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LECTURES AND SERMONS.



## PREFACE.

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**T**HIS volume, containing a selection from the Lectures and Sermons of the late Dr. Davidson, is now published in compliance with the request of many office-bearers and members of his late congregation and other friends.

It has not been thought necessary to prefix any memoir of Dr. Davidson ; but a tablet, erected to his memory in the church where he last ministered, records a few particulars which it may interest some to know. The inscription is as follows :—

IN MEMORY OF  
ALEXANDER DYCE DAVIDSON, D.D.  
MINISTER OF THIS CHURCH  
BORN IN ABERDEEN 8 MAY 1807  
ORDAINED MINISTER OF THE SOUTH CHURCH  
3 AUGUST 1832  
TRANSLATED TO THE WEST CHURCH  
5 MAY 1836  
SEPARATED FROM THE ESTABLISHMENT AT THE DISRUPTION ALONG WITH  
A LARGE CONGREGATION,  
23 MAY 1843  
OPENED THEIR CHURCH IN BELMONT STREET  
28 JANUARY 1844  
REMOVED TO THIS CHURCH 14 FEBRUARY 1869  
AND AFTER LABOURING SUCCESSFULLY FOR NEARLY FORTY YEARS AS  
A PREACHER OF CHRIST'S RIGHTEOUSNESS TO WARMLY ATTACHED FLOCKS  
HE FELL ASLEEP 27 APRIL 1872  
DECLARING 'HIS TRUST TO BE IN THE GREAT SALVATION AND THE  
GLORIOUS REDEEMER.'

To give some idea of the extent of his writings, it may be stated that, besides many discourses which he destroyed, and others which had been from time to time published, there were found upwards of eighteen hundred Lectures and Sermons,

which have been arranged in the order of their dates as follow :—

1. The last twenty-seven of the forty-one Lectures on the Epistle to the Philippians, from 30th December 1832 to 25th August 1833.

2. Ten Lectures on the History and Character of Samuel, from 22d September 1833 to 27th April 1834.

3. Twenty-three Lectures on the Christian Evidences, from 20th July 1834 to 11th January 1835.

4. Fourteen Lectures (*first series*) on Christ's Sermon on the Mount, from 28th June to 27th December 1835.

5. One hundred and nineteen Lectures on the Shorter Catechism, from 11th September 1836 to 24th March 1841.

6. Eight Lectures (*second series*) on the Life and Character of Samuel, from 4th March to 10th June 1838.

7. Six Sermons on the Heavenly Grace of Love, from 24th March to 15th September 1839.

8. Five hundred and forty-seven Lectures on parts of the Old Testament (*first series*), viz. :—

Fifty-three on Genesis, from 24th October 1841 to 28th July 1844.

Forty-four on Exodus, from 18th August 1844 to 22d February 1846.

Thirteen on Leviticus, from 8th March to 9th August 1846.

Thirty-eight on Numbers, from 23d August 1846 to 12th September 1847.

Thirty-eight on Deuteronomy, from 19th September 1847 to 27th January 1849.

Twenty-six on Joshua, from 4th February to 23d November 1849.

Twenty on Judges, from 9th December 1849 to 23d June 1850.

Five on Ruth, from 21st July to 1st September 1850.

Fifty-two on 1 Samuel, from 8th September 1850 to 11th July 1852.

Thirty-four on 2 Samuel, from 18th July 1852 to 25th September 1853.

One hundred and thirty-three on Kings and Chronicles, from 23d October 1853 to 8th November 1857.

Thirteen on Ezra, from 15th November 1857 to 21st February 1858.

Sixteen on Nehemiah, from 7th March to 22d August 1858.

*Note.*—The fifteen Lectures on the Book of Esther, from 29th August 1858 to 30th January 1859, were published in 1859, and the mss. destroyed.

Ten on Malachi, from 6th February to 15th May 1859.

Fifty-two on Job, from 4th December 1859 to 23d June 1861.

9. Five Lectures on the Spiritual Life, from 1st August to 19th December 1858.

10. Four Sermons on the Christian Armour, from 26th June to 21st August 1859.

11. Eighty-eight Lectures on the Epistle to the Hebrews, from 18th August 1861 to 24th January 1864.

12. Thirty-nine Lectures (*second series*) on Christ's Sermon on the Mount, from 4th September 1864 to 29th October 1865.

13. One hundred and ninety-three Lectures (*second series*) on parts of the Old Testament, viz. :—

Forty-eight on Genesis, from 14th January 1866 to 12th May 1867.

Seventy-two on Exodus, from 19th May 1867 to 20th June 1869.

Fifteen on Leviticus, from 18th August to 19th December 1869.

Thirty-seven on Numbers, from 26th December 1869 to 26th February 1871.

Twenty-one on Deuteronomy, from 5th March 1871 to 11th February 1872,—the last time he was in his pulpit.

14. Sixty-nine Action Sermons at Communions.

15. Nineteen Sermons out of the ordinary course, and specially for Sabbaths preceding the Communion.

16. Twelve Sermons also out of the ordinary course, and specially for Sabbaths after the Communion.

17. Forty New-Year's Day Sermons.

18. Forty-nine Sermons for days of Humiliation and of Thanksgiving for the Harvest.

19. Eight Sermons at Ordinations of Elders and Deacons, from 7th March 1833 to 13th June 1870.

20. Twenty-two Lectures to Divinity Students, session 1844–45.

21. Nine Sermons on the Fruit of the Spirit, from 19th February to 12th November 1871.

22. Four Sermons on Practical Religion, from 26th November 1871 to 21st January 1872.

23. Sixty-one Sermons and Lectures for special occasions or on public questions,—such as Opening Churches; Ordinations, Inductions, and Introductions of Ministers; Meetings of Synod; Divine Origin of the Bible and its Circulation; Sabbath Observance; Popish Controversy; Popery of Protestants; Schemes of the Church; on behalf of Local Charities and Associations; and in connection with the Deaths of Eminent Men.

24. One hundred and twenty-four Sermons and Lectures, preached

on ordinary occasions, on texts in the Old Testament, from 1832 to 1872.

25. Three hundred and eight Sermons and Lectures, preached on ordinary occasions, on texts in the New Testament, from 1832 to 1872.

In addition to the above, Dr. Davidson left many written addresses at fencing the tables, previous to the celebration of the Lord's Supper; addresses at the table; notes of exposition of the Confession of Faith; and of continuous portions of the Scripture at the weekly prayer meetings, held on Thursday evenings during the greater part of his ministry.

From such a mass it would have been difficult, and no attempt has been made by a perusal of the whole, to make a proper selection. In making a selection, regard has been had to the impressions which particular discourses made at the time on the minds of his ordinary hearers, and to the occasions on which Dr. Davidson afterwards preached them. But after the selection was made, it was found that many of those selected had to be reserved, in order that the present publication should not extend beyond one volume.

Those now published are specimens of Dr. Davidson's ordinary pulpit ministrations, from the time of his translation to the West Church in May 1836 to the end of 1870, and they are arranged in the order of their dates.

After his death, funeral sermons were preached in the Free West Church, by Professor Smeaton of the New College, Edinburgh, and Principal Lumsden of the Free Church College, Aberdeen. Reference is made to these for some particulars of Dr. Davidson's character and labours as a minister of the gospel.

The Free Church Presbytery of Aberdeen, at their first meeting after Dr. Davidson's funeral, also recorded a tribute to his memory, drawn up by his old and much valued friend, the Rev. Dr. Robert James Brown, in the following terms, viz. :—

'The Presbytery desire to record their very deep regret for the heavy loss which they, in common with the Free West Church congregation, the Christian community in this city, and the Church at large, have sustained by the removal from among them of the Rev. Dr. A. D. Davidson, minister of the Free West Church. Possessed of

superior talents, most assiduously cultivated from his early days ; of remarkable attainments, both in general literature and in Biblical scholarship ; of great facility in giving expression to his thoughts in a clear and forcible diction ; of an eloquence at once calm and sweetly persuasive, he manifested, without a semblance of art or parade of learning, a mighty power over the minds and consciences of his hearers. And the true source and secret of all this mighty power was the intenseness of his own faith in the doctrines of the gospel, and the warmth of his love to their souls. His pulpit and week-day ministrations were so thoroughly pervaded by the soundest views of pure gospel doctrine, and at the same time so evangelically practical, that they ever conveyed the strongest impression of the inseparable connection between a pure faith, the work of the Spirit, and a life of holiness, humility, and love to immortal souls. During a period of forty years, throughout which he was privileged to exercise a ministry much owned of his Master, first in two important congregations in the Established Church, and afterwards in one, both numerous and influential, in the Free Church, with which he unhesitatingly cast in his lot at the memorable Disruption, the happy influence which he exercised by the blessing of God was never impaired. Equally faithful and indefatigable in devoting all the talents entrusted to him in the service of his divine Master, in the years of declining health as in the days of vigorous manhood, he never ceased, while able, to proclaim the message of salvation, to throw his whole soul into the delivery of that message, realizing the full import of the message itself, and the solemn issues involved in its acceptance or rejection. In expounding the truths of the Word, he manifested a very thorough and intimate acquaintance with Scripture ; and by Bible illustration and beautiful imagery drawn from every source, he threw a clear light upon every subject handled in the pulpit. Nor were his private ministrations and counsels less earnest, less affectionate, less wise, less characterized by fearlessness of man's opinion, less stamped with the image of his own faith, and humility, and love. His demeanour in the intercourse of private life was marked by simplicity, and cheerfulness, and modesty. While his conversation breathed a spirit of manly sense, and displayed an intelligent acquaintance with the thought and knowledge of his own times, it was always pervaded by the savour of the gospel. Though taking a deep interest in all that related to Christ's cause, and especially in connection with the Free Church, he was oftentimes withheld by his modest diffidence, by his devotion to his pulpit preparations, and latterly by the state of his health, from taking that prominent position in the Church's councils which he was so highly fitted to occupy. The Presbytery desire to give expression to their thankfulness to the God and Father of their Lord and Saviour for all that He enabled His deceased servant to accom-

plish. Though dead, he yet speaketh, and long will his memory be fragrant among the members of his much-attached flock, and the people of God in this city and neighbourhood. The Presbytery record their warm sympathy with the relatives of their late much loved and honoured brother, and commend them to God and the power of His grace, and also with the office-bearers and congregation of the Free West Church, under their heavy bereavement; and they pray that a sanctified use of this dispensation may be granted, and that the Lord may send them, in due time, a pastor after His own heart, like unto him whom they now so deeply mourn, who will feed the flock abundantly with the bread of life.'

KINGSWELLS, 31st *August* 1872.



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## I.

### THE SUBJECT OF PREACHING: JESUS CHRIST AND HIM CRUCIFIED.<sup>1</sup>

‘For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.’—1 Cor. ii. 2.

THESE words carry us back to the time when the apostle formed the resolution of going to Corinth to preach the gospel, and when, as it was natural for him to do, he was revolving in his mind the manner in which he would most effectually discharge the arduous and responsible duties connected with the office of the Christian ministry. From his mode of expressing himself, ‘I *determined* not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ,’ it would almost appear that he had previously felt himself, if I may so speak, under some temptation to act otherwise than he finally purposed,—that he had had to combat feelings perhaps altogether the offspring of his own mind, and perhaps suggested partly by the circumstances of the people among whom he was to labour,—feelings which, had he allowed himself to be influenced by them, would have led him to follow a very different course from that which he actually pursued,—and that it was only after weighing fully and maturely what duty required, and what presented itself in opposition to it, that he formed the determination expressed in the words of the text. It may indeed by some be thought incredible that Paul should have had to weigh and to determine what should be the great subject of his preaching among the Corinthians, any more than in the other places where he had laboured; and we do not conceive that his hesitation, if he did hesitate, was other than momentary. But after all, like other men, he had a corrupt heart to subdue, and rebellious affections to regulate; and bold and resolute as he was during the whole of his

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Davidson’s first sermon in the West Church, 8th May 1836.

course, there were no doubt seasons when weakness and irresolution—the remnants of the old man within him—sought to spread themselves over his mind, and to paralyze his energies, although ultimately they never gained the ascendancy. And besides, there was something in the circumstances of the Corinthians which, we can easily imagine, must have rendered it somewhat difficult for the apostle to decide what particular method he might adopt with the greatest effect, to secure for the truth that paramount influence among them which he wished it to acquire. At the time when the gospel was first proclaimed to the Corinthians, Corinth was the seat of knowledge, of science, and of luxury. The liberal arts, for the cultivation of which the Greeks were so much celebrated, had there fixed their principal abode. All those pursuits which address themselves more immediately to the imagination and the taste, flourished there under the fostering hand of wealth and its consequent refinement; and to gain the ear of the Corinthians, and make an impression upon their hearts, one would have needed to invest truth with all the charms of eloquence, and all the graces of a soft and polished and harmonious diction. We may suppose, then, that as the apostle journeyed towards that city to preach the gospel, he might well ask himself, How am I to get access to the hearts of a Corinthian audience? Will they listen to such plain and unadorned statements as I have made to others respecting the mode of salvation by a crucified Redeemer? If my labours among them are to be successful, must I not endeavour in some measure to meet their prejudices, and conceal those parts of the truth which are most likely to prove offensive to them? And must I not adorn my preaching with the graces of eloquence, to make way for it to their hearts? And will not this be only a harmless accommodation to circumstances which it is impossible for me at present to alter? Such, we conceive, may have been some of the reflections that would occupy the mind of Paul as he pursued his journey toward Corinth; but before he reached his destination they had all given place to the noble sentiment which he expresses in the words before us. He remembered that underneath the glittering surface of polished

society there was hid a depth of depravity by human eye immeasurable,—that the wisdom on which the men of this world pride themselves is foolishness in the sight of God,—that the only way in which the human soul can be purged from the guilt and the defilement into which it has sunk, is by the blood of Jesus ; and remembering these things, therefore, he thrust aside every doubt that would have interfered to turn him from his path, and every feeling that would have led him to compromise those precious truths which, as the messenger of Heaven, he was commissioned to announce to guilty men, and ‘determined to know nothing among the Corinthians, save Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.’ Now, if the Apostle Paul found it necessary to fortify himself against temptations to unfaithfulness in the discharge of ministerial duty, by sketching out, as it were, beforehand the precise line which he was to pursue, and thus binding himself undeviatingly to adhere to it, how necessary is it for those who are now entrusted with the sacred office of ambassadors for Christ, in the midst of the difficulties by which they are beset, and of the temptations to unfaithfulness which incessantly assail them—how necessary is it for them, at the very commencement of their ministrations, to entrench themselves within the ground which is marked out by the experience of such a man as Paul ! That ground, then, is described in the text ; and you will perceive that it concentrates all the topics which come within the range of the Christian ministry—all the truths which the teachers of religion have to inculcate in this one topic, and this one truth—‘Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.’ That was the great subject of Paul’s preaching, and it must therefore be the leading theme of all who, like him, are commissioned to turn men from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God. And what I would wish to accomplish in the remainder of this discourse, is to show that the preaching of Christ crucified is precisely the great topic which is accommodated to the necessities of mankind,—that by making known the Redeemer in His death and sufferings for sin, and pressing Him upon the acceptance of our fellow-creatures, we adopt the only plan which can be pursued for promoting their well-being both in time and in

eternity,—that, at the risk of being charged with frequent repetition of the same things, and of having the gospel represented as destitute of variety, we must nevertheless act as the apostle did, determining to know nothing else among our people than Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

I. In the first place, then, the preaching of Christ crucified is the great doctrine suitable for man viewed as a being guilty in the sight of God.

That this is the natural condition of the human race the Scripture loudly testifies, and its testimony is corroborated by the voice of conscience. ‘They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none of them that doeth good, no, not one.’ It is unnecessary to multiply quotations to the same effect, as no one can have looked into the word of God without perceiving in it the strongest and the most alarming statements with respect to the guilt of man. And what is especially to be kept in view, it is not the case, as some imagine, that this guilt is contracted merely by so many positive violations of the divine law; on the contrary, it is something that adheres to us in consequence of Adam’s breach of the first covenant,—it is something that we bring into the world with us,—something that we may augment, and that we do augment, by our actual transgression of God’s commandments, but which we cannot remove by any service or obedience of our own. Let me entreat your attention for a moment to *this* point, as it concerns each of us most closely. The view which many people entertain of the condition of mankind is, that in this world they are placed simply in a state of probation,—that if they discharge with tolerable accuracy their religious duties, that is, the duties of secret prayer and attendance upon the sanctuary, and act honestly and justly toward their fellow-creatures, then they have nothing to fear, because God is merciful and gracious, and Christ has died for sinners. In other words, they hold that none will be condemned at last but the most heinous, and obstinate, and incorrigible offenders,—those who have set at nought divine and human laws, and who have been to every good work reprobate. Can it be possible, they ask, that

individuals who have passed through life quietly and inoffensively, who have displayed so many amiable qualities in their intercourse with mankind, and who have ever been ready to countenance every praiseworthy and benevolent object, are to be charged with guilt, and represented as lying under the wrath of God, and classed with those who have lived without any fear of God before their eyes? Yes, brethren, such is the truth as it is propounded in the unerring record of the God of truth. There are indeed differences in the amount of guilt recognised in the Scripture; but guilty and therefore liable to punishment we all are, on account of the transgression of the first man. The Bible finds us in a state of guilt; it does not cast us into it. The fact would have been the same, although a page of that blessed word had never been written for our comfort. It is true, indeed, that if we had not received a revelation from God, we might have flattered ourselves with the prospect of happiness beyond the grave,—if it had been possible for us to arrive at the knowledge of a future state,—and we might have contrived to silence conscience, as many do at present, by indulging in every species of worldly enjoyment; but still the fact would not have been changed by our ignorance or forgetfulness of it,—the fact that we are covenant-breakers in the sight of God, and that the penalty therefore of the broken covenant we must endure. Bethink yourselves, then, of the solemn circumstances in which you stand. God Himself brings against you the charge of guilt,—guilt which no acknowledgment of yours can modify, and no future endeavour of yours can atone for. The sentence, indeed, with which that guilt shall be visited is to be executed hereafter,—the judgment which will precede the sentence is for the present delayed. Death, which ushers the soul to the tribunal, seems at present at a distance; visions of happiness, and prospects of enjoyment almost endless, appear to be between you and the threatenings of Scripture and the trump of the archangel. But these visions will pass away: death will come, judgment will come, the sentence will come, and the punishment of guilt will come, to all who have refused God's gracious invitations. Say, then, what in these circumstances is the

duty of the ambassadors of Christ? Are they to endeavour to gain the applauses of their perishing fellow-creatures by displaying from week to week the depth of their own erudition, and the extent of their researches, while the great matter of reconciliation with God is left altogether untouched? Are they to strive by smooth words and flattering statements to please the ears of those who listen to them, when this will only seal them up more deeply in their spiritual slumber? Are they to set before them nothing else than the requirements of the law, as if the deeds of the law could justify them before God,—as if those very requirements did not bring guilt home to every man's conscience, and compel him to feel that he needs a remedy? Nay, in dealing thus with those committed to their charge, they would either be saying 'Peace, peace, while there was no peace,' or they would be tormenting them before the time. What, then, is the remedy which they are authorized to propose for the guilt in which all men are naturally involved? Just that one which is pointed out in the text, and which Paul carried to the Corinthians: 'Jesus Christ crucified.' Look to the suffering Redeemer, and you behold at once the outgoing of justice in avenging the broken covenant, and the outgoing of mercy toward the offenders. Does the law denounce a curse against every one who continues not in all things that are written in it? That curse was executed upon Christ; for it is written, 'Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree.' Was death threatened as the penalty of the first transgression? Christ submitted to death, and endured the penalty in His people's stead; so that now the question is, 'Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? it is Christ that died.' Is there a sentence recorded against every soul of man that doeth evil? Christ hath 'removed the handwriting that was contrary to us, and hath taken it out of the way, nailing it to His cross.' Do our consciences reproach us for bygone delinquencies, and remind us that there is a day of reckoning, and force upon our view the anticipation of future wrath? The sufferings of Christ for sin disarm the conscience of its power, for there is no condemnation to them that are in Jesus Christ; and being justified by faith, we have peace with God through Jesus Christ our



Lord. Is death clothed with terror to the guilty soul, as the introduction to a state where God is to be met face to face, and where punishment will no longer be delayed? Christ hath destroyed death, and him that had the power of it, and hath enabled His people when entering the dark valley to say, 'O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory through Jesus Christ our Lord.' The knowledge of Christ crucified, then, is precisely that which man needs to have imparted to him when viewed as guilty in the sight of God. And if, anxious to put the matter to the test of experiment, we ask those who have appreciated that knowledge, and accepted of Christ as their Saviour, how they obtained that peace of conscience, and that hope in God which they presently enjoy; their answer will be, that it was by being brought to believe that their sins were transferred to Christ, and atoned for by Him upon the cross, and by thus arriving at the conviction that God had no longer any controversy with them, but that He was well pleased with them for Christ's righteousness' sake. Is not this your experience, ye who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before you in the gospel? Was it not the apprehension of Christ reconciling God to man, and man to God, by the blood of His cross, that erected the foundation on which you could build your hopes for eternity? Was it not this that dispelled the cloud that cast a gloomy shadow over your very choicest enjoyments? And is it not this that you cling to as your hope amid all the trials and vicissitudes of the present life? And were you asked what should form the commencement, and the burden, and the termination of a Christian ministry, would not your answer be, 'Jesus Christ, and Him crucified?'

II. In the second place, the preaching of Christ crucified is the only doctrine suitable for man viewed as a being who has to be raised to holiness, that he may be fitted for the enjoyment of God.

Innumerable are the declarations of Scripture to the effect that men must be born again,—that they must be renewed

after the image of God,—that they must be made holy before they can dwell in God's presence. 'Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.' 'Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.' 'Evil shall not dwell with Thee. The foolish shall not stand in Thy sight; Thou hatest all the workers of iniquity.' These are the testimonies of the word of God; and even if it had not spoken so explicitly, we might have concluded from the nature of the thing, that a change must pass over the human soul before it can inhale the air of the heavenly paradise, since defiled by sin it could neither relish the society nor the enjoyments of the blessed spirits who surround God's throne. How, then, is this change to be effected? how is holiness to be transfused into a soul dead in trespasses and sins? The question is all-important; in what manner is it to be solved? Were we in any ordinary case desirous to bring any disposition, or any class of dispositions, peculiarly into play in the mind of any one, we would without hesitation adopt this as the plan most likely to succeed in accomplishing our object. We would exhibit the excellence of that disposition, and endeavour to stimulate to the cultivation of it, by producing the brightest examples we could find of its exercise. Will this plan then succeed in urging the claims of holiness upon the attention of mankind? Nay; describe holiness as you will, —speak of its beauty, of its dignity, of its intrinsic excellence, —invest the subject with all the charms which fancy can devise or language utter,—and to the human heart alienated from Christ, and unmoved by grace, your efforts will be as unavailing as if you were to exhibit the finest combination of colours to the blind, or to produce before the deaf the softest and the sweetest music; for, says the Scripture, 'the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God.' Or if, attempting to gain your end by reference to example, you take the character of God, who is holiness itself, your endeavours will be equally fruitless. For it is the very purity of His nature—His abhorrence of sin, and His righteous determination to punish it—that makes Him an object of terror and of hatred to His creatures. Can it be possible, you will ask, that God is an object of terror and of

hatred to any one? It is even so, my friends. 'The carnal mind is enmity against God,' says the Scripture; and the language of the unrenewed heart is, as expressed in the book of Job, 'Depart from me, for I desire not the knowledge of thy ways. What is the Almighty, that I should serve him? and what profit shall I have if I pray unto him?' And are not these striking passages verified by all experience? Is there anything more painful, more exquisitely painful, to a man ignorant of Christ, than the thought of God as the God of holiness and justice? Is there any thought which he is more anxious to banish from his mind when it does intrude itself? Shut him up in retirement for a day, and let him have this thought pressed upon him on all sides, and kept before him, and you plunge him into utter wretchedness. Holiness, then, will not be produced in man by any description that can be given of it, nor by the exhibition of the character of God which furnished the only perfect example of it. Will they be driven, then, to the cultivation of it by our working upon their fears? Nay, array before them all the terrors of the law, and all the solemnities of judgment to come; let fancy picture in the most frightful colours the torments that await the wicked; and let the truth be urged as powerfully as human voice can urge it, that unless they depart from their wickedness, and cultivate that holiness which God requires, these torments will everlastingly be theirs, and the only effect you will produce upon them will be to fill them with yet deeper enmity against the God of holiness.

Again, therefore, the question recurs: How is holiness to be transfused into the soul dead in trespasses and sins? And here, as in the former case, the answer is to be found in the text, and is summed up in this: The preaching of Christ crucified. Bring the truth to bear upon the mind, that God so loved the world as to give His only-begotten Son a ransom for sinners, and let this truth, by the working of the Spirit, be believed and relied on, and you provide at once for the production and the growth of holiness. When the justice of God is seen vindicating itself in the agonies of the Redeemer,—when the truth of God is contemplated enacting even to the very letter the punishment which was threatened on account

of sin,—when the holiness of God is exhibited shutting up the streams of the divine complacency from the beloved of the Father at the time when the iniquities of His people were laid on Him,—and when all this is seen and believed to originate in God's love toward His offending creatures, and His anxiety for their salvation,—the divine character then assumes a new and a more engaging aspect. The sinner, who had before regarded God as his enemy, comes to look upon Him as his friend, and is melted by His goodness when he surveys him sparing not His own Son, but giving Him up to death for the guilty. The very root of enmity is destroyed within him by the sight of the bleeding Saviour ; and he who could neither be softened by eloquence nor subdued by fear, is led captive by the belief of the truth that God is reconciled to him through Jesus Christ crucified. Then, when this change has passed upon him, he delights habitually to turn his thoughts to the contemplation of God. With the same anxiety wherewith he formerly endeavoured to banish God from his mind, he now strives to keep Him constantly before him : his delight is to realize the presence of God with him ; and his language, instead of being, ' Depart from me, for I desire not the knowledge of thy ways,' is that of the Psalmist, ' My soul thirsteth for God, my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God.' And withal, everything is valued by him in proportion to its tendency to bring him near to the gracious Being whom he has learnt to love. The Scriptures, as revealing the purposes of God, and containing a transcript of His will and His perfection ; prayer, as opening up a channel through which he may hold intercourse with God ; and all the other ordinances of religion, presenting so many means of raising his soul from earthly things toward God ;—all these become invested in his view with a new value and a new importance. And thus maintaining, if I may so speak, habitual companionship with God, he catches as it were the spirit that reigns in God's immediate presence : the desires which obtained dominion over him when the old nature had the supremacy are banished, and replaced by others more congenial to the divine society which he now delights to cultivate ; his tastes and habits acquire a new and heavenly colouring ; his affections are set upon the

things of God ; and, in a word, sin is mortified and crucified within him, and the image of God is gradually impressed upon his soul. Such is the transformation which is effected by the believing reception of the truth that Christ suffered for the sin of His people, thereby magnifying the law and satisfying the justice of God, and opening up a way by which He might give vent to His love in consistency with all His adorable perfections. When you reflect, then, that the resemblance to God which is thus generated on earth in the souls of His people is that which qualifies them for heaven's felicity, and that without it they cannot see God, and would not be happy even if they were admitted into His presence, you will surely once more admit that the commencement, and the burden, and the termination of the Christian ministry, ought to be, as Paul expresses it, ' Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.'

III. The preaching of Christ crucified is the only subject suitable for making an impression upon man in the way of leading him to the discharge of active duty.

Man is constitutionally an active being, and as such he has certain duties to perform which are prescribed to him in the word of God. Now it is upon his performance of these duties that the genuineness of his religious profession rests,—the growth of holiness in the heart being indicated by the fruits of righteousness in the life. But if man is formed for duty, and if the extent to which he discharges it be the surest, and indeed the only, evidence by which the reality of his Christian discipleship can be demonstrated, it becomes an important question how he may be most effectually influenced to comply with God's requirements. Various are the methods, then, to which we may have recourse for the purpose of securing his compliance. We may address ourselves to his fears, and describe the punishment of disobedience, and warn him, as he values the interests of his immortal soul, to adhere to the path which God has marked out for him in His word. And perhaps such argument as this may with some be partially successful. They may abstain from certain sins, and they may perform certain things commanded, just because the fear of retribution hangs over them. Or we may take up

different ground, and address ourselves to his pride, pointing out the meanness of following this or that course, and the dignity that always attaches itself to the pursuit of virtue. And perhaps this line of argument may have the effect of leading some to yield a certain measure of obedience to the law of God. But will the performance of duty which is secured by presenting these and similar motives to the mind, be as extensive as it ought to be, or will it be acceptable to that God to whom the secrets of the heart are open? Nay, it will extend no further than self-interest and the desire to be esteemed by others lead; and to God it cannot be acceptable, because it does not proceed from love to Him: it is essentially selfish, and he who lives to himself cannot please God. I may safely appeal to the conscience of those now present, who as yet have not been renewed in the spirit of their mind, whether they do not feel that the measure of outward duty which they render, be it prayer, or deeds of beneficence, or anything else that God requires of them, is not rendered from any desire to glorify God; whether duty in general is not something burdensome and disagreeable to them; and whether, therefore, they are not anxious to devise excuses for the purpose of shaking themselves free from the obligation to do this or that, which after all they must feel they should have done. Every man who knows his own heart will acknowledge that this is too true a picture of one of its lamentable tendencies. Now we hold that there is only one method by which this tendency can be overcome, and men brought to delight in the practice of duty, and to account it their meat and drink to do the will of their Father who is in heaven; and that method is by their acceptance of Jesus Christ as their Saviour. When the sinner is once convinced that God loves him, and that, instead of consigning him to everlasting misery, He has sent His Son to die for him, that through His death the gates of heaven might be opened, and endless felicity put within his enjoyment; and when fear and doubt and suspicion have thus given place to hope and joy and confidence, then does he begin to ask what he can do to manifest his gratitude to his merciful Redeemer. The commandments of the law are then regarded, not as the imperious dictates of a master who has no

care for the happiness of his servants, but as the mild and gentle requirements of One who has loved us, and whom it is delightful to obey. The question is no longer, How can I do these things, placing myself under restraints, and denying myself pleasures, while others are at freedom to enjoy themselves as they please? but, Can I ever do enough for Him who for my sake endured the cross, despising the shame? These are the feelings that reign among the children of God, among those who have believed in Jesus Christ crucified. It is not a constrained but a willing service which they render, because it is a service which is the fruit of love and gratitude, and not of fear. It has indeed been frequently asserted, that to make Christ crucified the chief topic of preaching, and to set forth faith in Him as the instrument of the sinner's justification in the sight of God, is injurious to the interests of morality, and calculated to make men regardless of their conduct. The assertion, however, betrays the most deplorable ignorance both of the Bible and of the human heart. It betrays an ignorance of the Bible, because there it is declared in passages innumerable, that men are justified, and ever since the fall have been justified, not by the deeds of the law, but by the faith of Christ. And it betrays an ignorance of the human heart. For tell me what plan you would adopt as most likely to bring an individual to comply with your wishes, not only in your presence, but also in secret. Would you seek to bind him down by terror or by love? Terror may, indeed, secure his services when your eye is upon him, but it will only lead him to make the service as easy as possible to himself when you are not present. Love, on the other hand, will influence him in the one case as much as in the other, and under its power he will strive even to anticipate your wishes. Love, then, is the principle by which God binds His people to obedience. He presents the Saviour to them bearing their sins in His own body on the tree, and tells them to believe that His anger against them is pacified for Christ's sake. The reception of this precious truth kindles up in their breasts a corresponding love to the God of grace. 'What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits?' becomes the anxious inquiry of the believing soul; and under the influence of this inquiry

he goes forth rejoicing to have an opportunity of testifying his gratitude to Him that bought him with His blood, and abounding in all the fruits of active and holy obedience. Thus Christ crucified is the theme which pacifies the guilty conscience, which secures the growth of holiness, which provides for the discharge of duty, and which, therefore, to ministers and to people, should be all in all. Once more, then, let me ask you, if this should not form the commencement, and the burden, and the termination of the Christian ministry.

By the grace of God, then, my friends, and as standing in His presence, and accountable to Him for the discharge of that stewardship with which He has entrusted me, I purpose and determine, after the apostle of the Gentiles, to know nothing among you save Jesus Christ and Him crucified,—to hold forth the Redeemer as the only ground of the sinner's hope and the sinner's sanctification, and as furnishing, by His sufferings and death in the room of the guilty, the only motive that can effectually induce men to live not unto themselves, but unto God. I am well aware that the preaching of Christ, and the commending of the blessed truths which He has revealed to the consciences of men, will here, as elsewhere, excite the opposition of some men. Wedded to their sins and to their darling pursuits, and determined to enjoy, as they term it, the hour while it lasts, they turn a deaf ear to the entreaties of the Saviour and the admonitions of His servants. But however much their opposition is to be bewailed, we must not suffer it to turn us from our path; and if they are resolved to treasure up wrath to themselves against the day of wrath by despising God's proffered mercy, we are equally resolved that their blood shall be upon their own head. I am also aware that when a minister of the gospel makes Christ crucified the leading topic of his ministry, and interweaves it as far as possible with every other topic to which he calls the attention of his people from time to time, he shall run the risk of being thought destitute of variety. But when I reflect that scarce a Sabbath passes, on which there are not in the house of God one or more who are there for the last time, and hearing for the last time the announcement of God's purposes to men, I do feel that there is not a Sabbath on which it does



not become the ministers of Christ to speak to sinners of Christ's salvation. They are not, indeed, to use always the same language, and to have recourse perpetually to the same arguments and illustrations; but still the same great truth must substantially be pressed upon the notice of mankind—that it is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Is there any other truth which in all circumstances a Christian minister will find so suited to his purpose in some one of its aspects, as that truth that Christ died for sin? When I am called to awaken the obstinate sinner from his deadly lethargy, and to stimulate him to flee from the wrath to come, with what other weapon can I reach his impenetrable heart, than with the truth that Christ submitted to the cross for sinners? The terrors of the law will never soften without the proclamation of the love of God in Christ; but that love itself, felt by the influence of the Spirit's working, will draw forth the tears of penitence and the fruits of holiness from those whose state, to human eye, would have appeared most hopeless. When I am called to administer hope and comfort to the doubting believer, and to persuade him that God is waiting to be gracious, where shall I find argument to remove his doubts, to invigorate his hopes, and to send him on his way rejoicing, unless I draw it from the fact that He who spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, shall with Him also freely give us all things? When I wish to arouse to deeds of sympathy, and plead the cause of the poor who have none to help them, or of the heathen who are perishing for lack of knowledge, whence shall I select the views that will most readily excite the working of Christian benevolence, except from the fact that Christ, who was rich, for our sakes became poor, that we through His poverty might be rich? When I am called to fortify those whom God has been pleased to afflict either with bodily sickness or with worldly trials, and to address to them the lessons of patience and quiet submission to Jehovah's will, where shall I find an argument for my purpose so fit as this one, Christ also suffered, the just for the unjust? When I am called to see a fellow-creature stretched upon the death-bed, and to encourage the soul in that trying hour, and to inspire it with

comfort and hope in its passage through the dark valley, what can I speak of but the death of Christ for sin? what comfort can I give, but that which flows from the love of the Redeemer? what hope can I point to, but that the atonement of the Redeemer extends even to the chief of sinners? And when I am called to sympathize with those who have suffered the most afflictive bereavements, whose earthly friends have been removed in the well-grounded hope of a glorious resurrection from this state of sorrow, and sin, and trial, where shall I find the language of consolation, if not here, that Jesus who died rose again, and that He will come at last to change the vile bodies of His people?

And now, my brethren, while it thus appears to be the duty of every Christian minister to preach Christ crucified, let me remind you that it is your duty to believe upon Him. I say it is your duty. This is the commandment of God, that ye believe in Him whom God hath sent. Yet well may it be asked, Can you of yourselves believe? No; the Spirit of God must water the truth preached to make it effectual, and open the heart to receive it. Amen.

## II.

### THE GLORIFYING OF GOD.<sup>1</sup>

‘Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.’—1 COR. x. 31.

EVERY thoughtful man must be aware, and every man imbued with the spirit of religion must regret, that amid all the facilities which we enjoy in this Christian land of acquiring a knowledge of the doctrines contained in the word of God, there should still be so much actual ignorance among us, even of the very rudiments of divine truth. I do not speak of the deeply to be lamented fact, that the power of the truth is not felt by multitudes who make an outward profession of it; nor do I allude to any circumstances in one denomination of Christians as contrasted with another, but generally with reference to a mere acquaintance with Christian doctrine. It is the fact that the language of the apostle to the Hebrews is but too applicable, that when for the time many who have waited upon sacred ordinances ought to be teachers, yet they have need that some teach themselves which be the first principles of the oracles of God. This fact, independently of the other arguments by which it is made out to us, is abundantly verified by the circumstance that in many cases, when people have the near prospect of eternity before them, and when their thoughts are more intently fixed upon religion than at other times, we cannot draw from them any distinct and well-defined account of their religious creed, nor ascertain precisely on what ground their hopes of happiness beyond the grave are fixed. It becomes an important question, then, in what manner this prevailing ignorance of things spiritual may be

<sup>1</sup> The first of the series of 119 Lectures on the Shorter Catechism, 11th Sept. 1836.

most effectually removed, or what steps the teachers of religion may adopt with the greatest probability of success, for the purpose of imparting as clear a conception as possible of the various truths which God has revealed. Now one method which suggests itself at once for the attainment of this end, on the supposition that the same people worship regularly in the same place, is that we present to them in some regular form the various doctrines which the Bible proposes to their belief, and the leading duties which it enforces for their practice. This indeed is the plan which in the majority of cases is in one way or other pursued; but then it is a point that may be argued, whether all the advantages contemplated may be most effectually secured by following a regular plan, without giving any direct intimation to that effect, or by plainly laying down beforehand a general sketch of the plan, and then proceeding to fill it up. The second of these methods we would conceive under any circumstances to be the best, as being the most likely to excite interest, as well as to evolve the very close and beautiful connection that subsists among all the doctrines of the gospel. But more especially does this method recommend itself to us, seeing that the founders of our Church have actually sketched out for us what may be called the general design of Christianity in the Shorter Catechism, placing before us the whole system of revealed truth in a form so simple and so luminous, that we can perceive, as it were at a glance, both what we have to believe concerning God, and the duty which God requires of us. What I would wish, therefore, by the assistance and blessing of God, to accomplish, as one of the most promising means of securing your edification, is in a series of discourses to present to you the various doctrines and duties which the Scripture teaches and inculcates, in the order in which they are expounded in the Catechism; that so ye may be acquainted with the whole counsel of God concerning the human race, and enabled to give an answer to every one that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you. In pursuing this plan, we shall no doubt have to review many subjects which to many of you may already be familiar; and as the end proposed can only be gained by our using great plainness of speech, some may

find fault with our statements as being accompanied with little that can please the ear or captivate the fancy. Still, brethren, we must remember that as it was not with embellishments of speech that the fishermen of Galilee overthrew the superstitions of the heathen, and planted the cross in the places that had been occupied by the heathen deities; so it is not by wisdom of words that the enmity of the heart against God can now be subdued, but through the instrumentality of a simple commendation of the truth to men's consciences, accompanied with the power of the Holy Ghost.

With these introductory remarks, then, we proceed to the consideration of the doctrine contained in the text, which brings us in contact with the first question of the Catechism, that it is the chief end of man to glorify God: 'Whether therefore ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.' What, then, is to be understood by glorifying God?—some special and practical directions as to the manner in which the duty is to be performed; and what are the principal motives that should lead us to desire to glorify Him? These are the three points to which our attention is now to be directed, as arising out of the apostle's words.

I. In the first place, what is to be understood by glorifying God?

There are two senses in which the expression 'the glory of God' is to be taken in the Scriptures. It either signifies that infinite fulness of perfection which resides in the Godhead, which may be called God's essential glory, and which is manifested in all His works, whether of creation or of providence; or it denotes that ascription of praise and honour to Him which is rendered by His rational creatures. In the first of these senses, I need scarcely say that man cannot add to the glory of God, or take away from it. Although *we* had never existed, the same fulness of perfection would have resided in Jehovah; and the exhibition of His attributes, which He has given in calling us into being, in preserving us, and in devising and completing the scheme of redemption, neither rests upon our will, nor can in any way be affected by our feelings or our conduct. It is in the other sense then

alone, viz. in giving praise and honour to God, that we can glorify Him. We cannot make Him more glorious than He is, but we can show that He is glorious; we cannot add to the number of His perfections, but we can admire these perfections; we can declare our admiration of them to others; we can meditate upon them; and we can rejoice in them, and place confidence in them, as always exerted for our good. This, then, is to a certain extent what we are to understand by glorifying God. But there is more than this comprehended under the expression. God's attributes are exhibited in His works, in His various dealings with the human race, and in His word: so that to glorify Him is to meditate upon and admire His works, and show forth the wondrous perfection of them to others; to acquiesce in His dealings, and to feel and declare the holiness and justice of them; to love and reverence His word, and to endeavour to bring others to love and reverence it also. And still more particularly, God has expressed His will with regard to everything which man as His creature is bound to do; so that to glorify Him is to follow the course which His will points out for us, in preference to every other, whether suggested by our own inclination, or recommended by its apparent advantage to ourselves, or by the opinion of our fellow-creatures. In a word, then, to glorify God is to honour Him, by giving Him the first place in our own hearts, by submitting to His will whether in the way of suffering or of acting, and by striving to bring those who come within the sphere of our influence to honour Him also; or perhaps we comprehend every particular which the subject embraces, by employing the expression of the Psalmist, and saying that to glorify God is 'to set God always before us.' You will perceive, then, from the statements which have been made, that express *intention* is indispensable on our part to the glorifying of God. It is not enough that our actions are so ordered upon the whole as that Jehovah obtains glory *through* them, and that our schemes are so overruled by His wise providence as that they ultimately tend to advance His purposes; for in this case He gains honour for Himself—it is not we that give it Him. Even the designs and actions of wicked men are so controlled, under the righteous government

of God, as to promote His glory. The very counsels which they take in direct opposition to His revealed will, and the courses which they pursue for the overthrow of His cause in the world, and for the destruction of His people, are made to terminate in their own ruin, and in the advancement of His glory. If there is a *working* among godless men to subvert the interests of truth and righteousness, there is a *counter-working* on the part of the divine providence to carry forward these interests, and render them ultimately triumphant; and the wisdom and power of God are thus more conspicuously magnified in the view of the universe than they would have been. It was in this way that God got Him honour upon Pharaoh and his host, when He overwhelmed them in the Red Sea; for He then made it be felt that all the power of man is but as a straw before the whirlwind of the wrath of the Omnipotent. But, as I have already said, the wicked do not glorify God when their plans are thus frustrated, and good is brought out of the evil which they had devised; it is God that is glorified *upon* them: wherefore there must be design, aim, intention on our part to give God glory, before we can be said to answer the end which as His creatures we are bound to answer. And this being the case, brethren, we conceive that there is much in it to excite alarm among those who are resting in a mere nominal profession of Christianity. How will the man excuse himself to his own conscience, whose life hitherto has been passed without any reference to God, without any desire on his own part to honour God, or to induce others to honour Him? He may have spent his days quietly and harmlessly; he may be unable to charge himself with any feeling of malevolence or enmity against his fellow-creatures; nay, he may have done much to advance the happiness of others: and yet, after all, there may have been an habitual forgetfulness of the claim which God has to his services; he may have never once thought, with regard to any of his actions, that he had to consult another will than his own, or seek a higher interest than his own. His character, for the most part composed of negatives,—as that he is free from this habit to which another man is a slave; that he is unstained by this vice by which another man is tainted; that

he rushes not into those excesses by which another has injured his health and his reputation ;—his character, I say, thus composed of negatives, may be fair and unblemished, and suitable to his professions of religion as far as man can judge ; but when we come with the question, How much of all this has been done from a regard to the will of God, and how far have you positively aimed at honouring God ?—oh, how soon is the fair structure demolished, and the unpleasant conviction forced upon the mind, that in the midst of all this apparent *excellence* and regularity, the great end of existence has been lost sight of ! If, then, there are any among us who have hitherto never stopped to inquire what they were doing to glorify their Maker, but have pursued their plans with self-interest or self-aggrandizement only in their view, let them be admonished of their folly and their danger. There is a time coming when everything will hang heavy on the conscience except what has been done for God ; and it will be fearful if we have to look back upon our life without being able to fix upon any one thing that we have done for His glory. I do not say that anything can uphold the soul in time of trial excepting the deep-rooted conviction of Christ's all-sufficiency,—it is *that* alone which can give comfort under the sufferings of life or in the anticipation of eternity,—but assuredly in such seasons the feeling that God's glory has been kept out of sight will press upon the mind, and overwhelm it with an anguish unspeakable ; or if it do not, its absence will but corroborate what the Scripture says, that the soul may sink into a state of torpor which is rightly designated death spiritual, and which carries in it that unnatural and unseasonable calm which bespeaks the gathering storm. Let us then implore God to kindle within us a desire and an intention to promote His glory.

II. We come now, in the second place, to offer some special and practical directions as to the manner in which the duty of glorifying God is to be performed. Now the apostle in the text informs us that there is room for this duty in everything we do : 'Whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do *all* to the glory of God.' We might therefore enumerate under this general head a vast variety of subordinate parti-



culars ; but not to make the subject tedious by an excessive minuteness, and at the same time to render it as practical and useful as possible, I shall confine myself to such a line of observation as one might suppose would be followed in answering the question of a serious inquirer—‘How am I to act ? what am I to do that I may glorify God in the world ?’ Were such a question proposed by any one in good earnest—and every man ought earnestly to agitate it in his own mind—we would endeavour to show him first how he might indirectly contribute to advance God’s glory by his example ; and secondly, we would point out one or two things by which he might contribute more directly and positively to the advancement of it. Pursuing this division, then, I would remark that every professing Christian may be indirectly instrumental in glorifying God by keeping this principle always before him, that he is entrusted, as it were, with the guardianship of God’s glory—that God has committed His honour to his keeping in the world. And as every rule is best understood when illustrated by examples, we shall suppose one or two cases. You have it in your power to pursue a course which will be profitable to yourself, and which is not in opposition to the laws of the land or to the maxims of the world, but which, at the same time, is not precisely of such a kind as to harmonize with Christian feeling, which would rather interfere with the regularity and the strictness of a truly Christian deportment ; then viewing yourself as invested with the guardianship of God’s glory among men, you relinquish all thought of pursuing such a course, lest some should be prejudiced against the truth of God, which you profess by your entering on it. Or, again, you are requested to take part in some amusement which is harmless perhaps in itself, which is suitable enough to your own feelings, and which you can show by argument involves no compromise of right principle, but which people of weak mind may view in a different light, and which thoughtless people regard as standing upon the same ground with other amusements or gratifications of a more questionable nature ; then, in this case, as having God’s glory committed to your keeping, and being tender of it as something dear to you, you sacrifice your own

feelings, and shun the proposed amusement, lest you should wound the weak conscience of any of God's children, or give occasion to the thoughtless to imagine that, after all, there is no difference between the godly and the ungodly. Or, once more, you are exposed to a severe trial of temper in the management of your ordinary business, or your dignity has been assailed, or, in a word, your feelings have been so ruffled that no one acquainted with the peculiar situation in which you are placed would be astonished at your yielding to the impulse of anger, and retaliating forthwith the injury received; then, in such a case, regarding yourself as the keeper of God's glory, you will repress the irritation which would prompt to instant vengeance by such reasoning as this: What will be thought of a profession of religion, and of attachment to the Saviour, if I, who lay claim to it, am as hasty and ungovernable in my temper as those who regard religion with indifference? Let me rather submit to injury than cause the way of truth to be evil spoken of on my account. Such are some of the cases where the feeling that God has entrusted us with the keeping of His glory will lead to a course of action calculated to honour Him in the eyes of men; and by striving to live at all times under the influence of this feeling, we just conform to the comprehensive precept of our Lord, "Let your light so shine before men, that others, seeing your good works, may glorify your Father who is in heaven." But it is necessary to advert for a moment to a point in connection with this part of the subject which may lead to some misapprehension. While every Christian is bound to act as if the glory of God were committed to his trust, and while acting under this conviction he is bound to abstain from everything that would prejudice the interests of God's cause, that is, of Christianity, he must separate between what is prejudicial to himself personally, and what is hurtful to the interests of the truth. For example, I can conceive that a man who sustains a character for piety will endear himself to worldly-minded men by conforming to some of their favourite maxims; while, by resolutely keeping himself free from the contamination of these maxims, in so far as he believes them opposed to the word of God, he may give occasion to some to dislike himself,

and to speak of religion as an austere and gloomy thing, that wages war with human happiness. And I can conceive that, from his desire to commend religion to others, or from his fear lest it should be wounded through him, he *may* cross the line which divides the children of the world and their pursuits from the children of God and *theirs*, and conform more than he should do to the maxims of the world. Now, in such a case, the error that is committed is most dangerous. The individual in question forgets that it is not his own personal character as a religious man of which he is constituted the guardian, but the honour and the name of God, and that the very fact of his being faithful to his trust, and acting with a single eye to the advancement of God's honour, will necessarily excite the hostility of some, both against himself and against the cause which he espouses; he forgets that God is compromised when anything is done by His people to lower the unsullied holiness of His character, or the unbending rectitude of His laws.

So much, then, for the *indirect* instrumentality, as we may call it, through which God's glory is to be promoted by His people. And let me now remind you, that even one who wears the Christian name, be his situation in the world what it may, is able, and is bound, thus to promote it. Those who are invested with authority and influence, as the eyes of men are more fastened on them than on those who move in an humbler sphere, and as the force of their example circulates through many more channels than that of others, can certainly, as the guardians of God's glory, do more for the advancement of it than others, and therefore lie under a heavier weight of responsibility than others to live and act so as that God and religion may be honoured through them. But then the poorest and the humblest professor of the truth has some around him whom he can influence, and whom he must endeavour to influence, by living conformably to the will of God: he can shed a lustre upon the Christian profession, which, if it shine not so widely, may at least shine as steadily and as attractively, as that which emanates from the godly example and the steadfast faith of those whom Providence has placed in higher stations.

But it was remarked that Christians may contribute *directly* and positively to the advancement of God's glory in the world. Does it ever happen that you are placed in society where the cause of God and the truth of God are lightly thought of and lightly spoken of, where piety is accounted weakness of mind, and the exertions of pious men to ameliorate the condition of mankind are regarded as visionary or fanatical; and do you in these circumstances avow your sentiments, and feel no shame at having it known that you espouse the side of religion? Then you contribute to promote God's glory, by showing that you esteem His favour more than the approbation of men, and that you honour His judgment more than the opinions of men. Or, to state the point more generally, we glorify God directly when we 'contend,' to use the scriptural expression, 'for the faith once delivered to the saints.' There are some who, for the sake of peace, as they love to term it, will allow error to pass unproved, and suffer the distinction between right and wrong to be invaded rather than give rise to argument in maintaining what they believe to be according to the will of God. Now this, we hesitate not to say, is a sacrificing of God's honour which in no case, and for no reason, however specious, is allowable. It does indeed wear the semblance of Christianity to follow peace with all men: it is expressly commanded in the Scripture, and it cannot be too eagerly desired. Sacrifice for it personal comfort; endure for it personal reproach; give up anything for it, but the truth which God has revealed. *That* you must hold and defend at all hazards; for by defending it you honour it, and by honouring it you honour Him who gave it. Again, we contribute *directly* to the advancement of God's glory, by using every exertion to communicate the knowledge of Him to those who are destitute of it. This is perhaps the most obvious way in which man can glorify his Maker, and it is more or less within the reach of us all. The knowledge of God is principally to be derived from the Holy Scripture; and whosoever, therefore, contributes according to his means for the dissemination of the Scripture, whether at home or in distant lands—whosoever gives any portion of his time to the forwarding of those schemes which contemplate the

diffusion of the truth among the ignorant—whosoever lifts up his voice in prayer for a blessing upon the means that are in operation for evangelizing the world, is endeavouring in the most effectual way to promote God's honour. 'He that offereth praise,' says Jehovah, 'glorifieth me.' But those that sit in heathen darkness cannot praise Him, for they know Him not. And shall we who have been favoured with this knowledge suffer them to live and die in their ignorance, without an effort to relieve them? Nay, brethren, let us aid in gathering in that harvest of glory which will belong to God when the whole earth shall be filled with His knowledge. It were endless, however, to point out all the special ways in which God may be directly glorified by us, inasmuch as we are bound, according to what is stated in the text, to make the advancement of His honour the great aim of all that we say and do. To particularize, indeed, upon a subject like the present, is not to extend, but, as it were, to narrow the field of duty. Wherefore, in a word, as all that we are, and all that we have, is the gift of God, so all must be laid out with a reference to God. Our time, our energies of mind and body, and our wealth, must all be expended, not according to our own pleasure, or to gratify our own selfishness; but in such a way as is conformable to the will of God, that so our reverence for His will being manifest, He may gain honour through our instrumentality.

III. In the third place, we were to consider some of the principal motives that should lead us to desire to glorify God.

Here, however, we can do little more than advert to these in the most general way. First, a feeling of gratitude ought to move us to aim at God's glory. Has He called us into being, and loaded us with mercies innumerable; did He give up His Son to die for us, that He might redeem us from eternal perdition; and is He employed in making all things work together for our good? Then surely we cannot be insensible to all these manifestations of His mercy. We must feel an anxiety to do something to show that we prize His love and His goodness. But what can we do? Our goodness cannot extend to Him; our best services cannot profit

Him : how then can we manifest our gratitude ? He informs us Himself, that what He requires of us is, that we honour Him in the world ; as if He said, ‘I am interested in having my name known and revered among men ; in being acknowledged as the chief good, and felt to be the chief good, of the human race. I am interested in having honour paid to the truth which I have revealed, and in the dissemination of that truth in the world. Let my name be revered by you ; let me be avowed as your chief good in the midst of my enemies ; and let all your exertions be put forth to speed the progress of my truth and my cause among mankind.’ Such are the demands of God ; and who that looks to Christ, His unspeakable gift, will not endeavour to put aside his own little interests, and enlist all his energies in the work of making God be honoured in the world ?

Secondly, another consideration which ought to lead us to desire the promotion of God’s glory is, that in doing so we are most certainly advancing in likeness to Himself.

The whole tenor of the Scripture is to the effect that the end which God has in view in all His dealings with His creatures is the advancement of His own glory. And reason itself, when it is consulted, tells us that this must be the case, since the advancement of His glory is the highest and the noblest possible end. When we, therefore, make this the end of all our designs and actions, we just fall in with the very purpose of God—we identify ourselves, as it were, with God—we feel and act in the same way as God would have us to do—we are partakers, as the Scripture says, of the divine nature. How glorious, then, is it to have such an aim ! Man, with all his insignificance, thus rises toward an assimilation to the Eternal One ; and living and moving upon earth, carries about with him the feelings and is influenced by the principles which pervade the angels and the spirits of the just in heaven. Amen.

### III.

#### THE ENJOYING OF GOD.<sup>1</sup>

‘How excellent is Thy loving-kindness, O God ! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Thy wings. They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of Thy house ; and Thou shalt make them drink of the river of Thy pleasures. For with Thee is the fountain of life ; in Thy light shall we see light.’—Ps. xxxvi. 7–9.

**L**AST Lord’s day our attention was directed to the great end of man’s existence, the glorifying of God. On that occasion, after endeavouring to expound the meaning of the expression, I proceeded to answer an inquiry that would naturally suggest itself: If any one, seriously impressed by the truth, were to ask, ‘How am I to act, or what have I to do, for the purpose of glorifying God in the world?’ As a practical solution of this inquiry, and as tending to remove the obscurity in which some might feel the subject to be involved, it might be suggested that every one should conceive himself as personally entrusted with the guardianship of God’s honour in the world, and should speak and act as if in all circumstances every movement of his could bring honour immediately to God, or reflect discredit on Him. Thus, God’s professing people may advance His honour among men by their own personal submission to His law, and believing His testimony,—for instance, by defending the truth which He has revealed, when it is assailed by the infidel or by the scoffer, and by using every exertion to disseminate that truth in the world ; and to do this is to be fellow-workers with God. But the subject which now claims our attention is the enjoyment of God as a part of man’s chief good. The Psalmist prized the excellence of God’s loving-kindness, and put his trust under the shadow of His wings. He ex-

<sup>1</sup> The second lecture on the Shorter Catechism, 18th September 1836.

perienced the fatness of His house, and drank of the river of pleasures which flows from His throne. He felt that He was the fountain and the well-spring of life; and his own soul had been cheered by the light which beams from God, and which is reflected from His precious word. And judging from his own experience of these things, he speaks in the text of what others shall also feel and enjoy from the same source, intimating manifestly, if he does not express it in so many words, that no created good is sufficient to satisfy the desires of the immortal soul, or can be put in competition with the blessedness which is treasured up in God for them that love Him.

In entering upon this subject, however, we are most forcibly reminded of the utter inadequacy of human language to convey any clear exposition of it. The enjoyment of God is purely a matter of experience, and must therefore be felt to be understood. To a man who is a stranger to spiritual things, and whose affections and desires are confined within the narrow range of this world's pleasures and pursuits, it is as impossible to communicate any distinct conception of what is meant by enjoying God, as it would be to impart an idea of colour to a man born blind. In fact, the Scripture, in many passages, avails itself of this very comparison, for the purpose of showing us the fearful ravage which sin has wrought on our moral constitution, and the vastness of the change which we have to undergo in being turned from sin to God. When it speaks, for instance, of men while they are in an unconverted state as 'having the understanding darkened, and being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the *blindness* of their hearts;' and when it speaks, on the other hand, of those who have experienced divine grace, as 'having the eyes of their understanding enlightened, so that they know what is the hope of their calling,' it evidently authorizes us to affirm that, until the Spirit of God dissipates the darkness that has settled down on the mind of man, any representations we place before it of things spiritual and eternal are like so many pictures placed before the blind. But although no language can possibly convey the slightest notion of colour to a blind man,—although we



cannot make him sensible of the positive enjoyment that flows into the mind through the medium of the eye,—we can at least easily bring him to comprehend this, that the want of sight deprives him of certain enjoyments which would otherwise be open to him, and subjects him to certain inconveniences which he would otherwise escape. So, in like manner, although we cannot exhibit to the spiritually blind the full import of the expression, ‘the enjoying of God,’ just because they are destitute of the inward sense by which that enjoyment is experienced, we may nevertheless make even them perceive that there is a something which in their present circumstances they want to make their happiness complete, and that there are certain evils to which they unavoidably expose themselves, so long as their discernment of spiritual things remains clouded and impaired. For example, let us take an unconverted man in the most favourable situation in which such a man can be placed for the enjoyment of happiness, and let us try by the test of his own experience the amount of satisfaction which from the various avenues of gratification that are open to him he derives, and we shall find that underneath the specious tinsel of pleasures and delights in which he is wrapped, there is shrouded a host of miseries and disquietudes from which he can contrive no means of escape. Let him have wealth and extensive possessions, and be raised above the common reverses of fortune, and the anxieties which cleave more or less to every species of worldly business; let him be surrounded by dependants, to whom his slightest wish is a law, and by affectionate friends, who are really interested in his happiness; in a word, let him be furnished with all the means of self-gratification and comfort which the world can bestow, and still we say not only that something will be wanting to complete his happiness, but that he will be compelled to feel this to be the case. For what means that endless thirst for variety which pervades those who have been most liberally blessed with the bounties of providence, but who are strangers to the love of God; why, if their pleasures are pure and imperishable as to the eye of inexperience they seem to be,—why should they wander from one kind of enjoyment to another as they do, and betray so

restless an anxiety for change? If the fascinations of gay society, and the excitements of the crowded assembly, or the grosser pleasures which mere sensuality thirsts after, or the incense that is offered to wealth and rank, or the gratification which vanity receives from state and splendour,—if these things afford enjoyment so exquisite as one might suppose they do from the eagerness with which they are sought after, then why should they satiate their votaries so soon, and why should the one after the other be put aside and again pursued, and pursued and put aside, in an endless round? If, among the enjoyments which the world places within its reach, the soul could light upon any one sufficient for it, and adequate to its cravings, assuredly it would not exchange it for another; and the fact that worldly men are ever seeking for variety in their pleasures, demonstrates that in these pleasures there is nothing to satisfy them. And if, in those cases where there is every facility afforded for present enjoyment, and where there are few things to interfere with and to ruffle it, there is thus a want of satisfaction experienced, and a continual looking round for something more permanent and satisfying than what is present; much more will this hold good in those instances where men have to contend with all the ordinary cares and anxieties of life, and to suffer all the disappointments that are interwoven with the vicissitudes of earthly things. There cannot be a safe anchorage for the soul amid the fluctuations of human affairs, and the troubles that are inseparable from the pursuit of every temporal good; and moreover, when the thoughts are directed toward futurity, and the reproaches of conscience for the misimprovement of time, and the neglect of God's word, and the rejection of His offered mercy, have to be endured, then indeed is the acknowledgment extorted, that a shadow has been pursued for a substance, and enduring happiness sacrificed for that which at the best was a delusive dream. Now, while there is thus impressed upon all the enjoyments of unregenerate men a want of permanence and of satisfaction; and while at certain seasons, when the conscience is awakened, there is even a positive misery inflicted on them, which the voice of pleasure and the soothings of flattery cannot drown,—surely there is enough to make them sensible that the world

is not a sufficient portion for an immortal being, and that it is only in the unchangeable God that their souls can find a secure and an abiding resting-place. In this way, then, by throwing those who are ignorant of God, and who desire not the knowledge of His ways, back upon themselves, as it were, and referring them to their own experience, we can communicate to them some idea of what is meant by enjoying God. It is just the supply of that which they cannot but feel to be needful, and which the world cannot give them,—an imperishable object of all loveliness, on which their affections may be placed without the possibility of disappointment,—an immoveable rock of refuge, to which they may betake themselves without the possibility of being torn from it,—an inexhaustible storehouse of happiness, in which they can abide without the possibility of its being diminished,—a spring of pure and never-ending felicity, in which they can quench their thirst without satiety; for, says the Saviour, contrasting the enjoyment which the world yields with that which comes direct from God: ‘If any man drink of this water, he shall thirst again; but whosoever drinketh of that which I have to give shall never thirst, but it shall be in him a well of water springing up to life everlasting.’ But how comes it to pass, some may ask, that if worldly enjoyments are so unsatisfying as they have been represented to be, and if the difference between them and those which are treasured up in God is so obvious as to be felt by worldly men themselves, so many should still give an open and a decided preference to the less above the greater? Brethren, we must guard against being deceived by appearances. There is something that wears the semblance of satisfaction discernible among the enemies of God and of godliness: in general, they will not betray their secrets to those who espouse an opposite interest, and seldom even to each other; so that to look at them, they *do* seem to live in sunshine, and to be really happy. But the whole is tinsel, false, hollow, deceitful, like the master they serve. And we know this from those who have come over from them to the cause of Christ. Blessed be God for it, there are some who from time to time have power given to burst the bands of servitude by which they are held, and join themselves to the

Lord; and *they* tell us of the aching heart under the gay exterior,—of the constrained smiles that hide the pangs of remorse,—of the vanity and emptiness that reign among the votaries of pleasure, and are felt by them,—of the cravings of soul which no amusement can fully gratify,—of the death which lurks under the specious appearance of life and happiness that pervades the abodes of folly. They tell us, too, of the lasting and ever-increasing enjoyment which they have experienced since they forsook the paths of sin and vanity; they tell us of the rest which, weary and heavy laden, they have found for their souls in Christ,—of a delight which they feel in living near to God, infinitely outweighing the fallacious pleasure which they drew from the turbid springs of worldly felicity,—and of the calmness and serenity of mind which they are now privileged to enjoy amid all the changes and anxieties of the present life; so that with one voice they testify what the experience of the ungodly themselves at least re-echoes,—that without God there is no permanent and satisfying enjoyment, and that in God there is something to which the soul can cling as adequate to all its desires.

But having thus attempted to bring the subject before us in some measure within the range of the conceptions of those who are *practically* unacquainted with it, by showing them that the enjoyment of God holds out to them the very thing which they need, and which they look for in vain from any other source, we must now proceed to speak more directly of the nature of this enjoyment, and of its excellence.

What, then, is precisely to be understood by enjoying God? I remark, first, that in the enjoying of God there is implied a sense of His love and favour.

This is expressed by the Psalmist in the text, in the words, ‘How excellent is Thy loving-kindness, O God! therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Thy wings.’ Now these feelings are not congenial to the mind of fallen man; for he neither loves God, nor places confidence in Him as really interested in the happiness of His creatures. On the contrary, the natural tendency of the human heart is to distrust God, and to regard Him as an enemy. There may, indeed, be an occasional recognition of His providential kind-

ness on the part of many who are actually at enmity with Him; and there may be something like confidence in His boundless mercy exhibited by those who are strangers to the way of reconciliation with Him which He has pointed out in His word. But then this *confidence*, if we may call it so, rests merely on a presumption, and only lasts while the ground of it is not subjected to a searching scrutiny. And this acknowledgment of God's kindness in providence is altogether unaccompanied with any feeling of love and of devotedness to Him. It is only when the soul is enlightened in the knowledge of Christ; when His obedience to the law, and His suffering of death in the room of sinners, are seen, upon the authority of the word of God, to be an adequate satisfaction to the divine justice; and when they are felt and trusted in as such;—it is only then that the sense of God's love and favour is shed abroad in the heart, and truly realized. The wall of partition between the holy Jehovah and the sinful creature is then seen to be broken down; the weight of guilt that hung upon the conscience is then removed; the threatenings that formerly disquieted and terrified the soul are then hushed into silence; the reality of God's merciful designs toward His sinful creatures is then perceived; and man, from feeling himself an alien and an enemy, comes to rejoice in being constituted a member of the family of God. This is the commencement of the divine enjoyment. The soul, freed from that slavish terror under the influence of which it could only look up to God with suspicion, now rises in affection and desire toward heaven, and the believer regards God as his Father and his friend. His hand is recognised in the ordering and the arrangement of all that concerns Him. If providence smile, its bounties are felt to be a Father's gift; if affliction or adversity is sent, it is acquiesced in as a Father's chastisement. And while the things of time thus assume, as it were, a new aspect, and give rise to new feelings in the believer's heart, the things that are unseen and eternal also put on a new appearance. Formerly all was dark and gloomy in futurity, and the soul, conscious of guilt, could only obtain repose by banishing the thought of futurity; but now the darkness is dissipated. The conviction that God loves him, and has no longer any contro-

versy with him, brings the whole range of the divine promises within the grasp of the believer. He beholds the truth of them sealed by the death of Jesus ; he perceives the realities which they embrace opened up for his own enjoyment, as now reconciled by the blood of Jesus ; and thus he is enabled to rejoice in his prospects with a joy that is unspeakable and full of glory. Oh, then, how delightful a thing it is to carry about with us the feeling that God is our friend, and that we are personally partakers of His love ! To view His present dealings with us as so many special marks of His affection, and of His interest in our well-being ; and to regard all the glories which lie beyond the grave as reserved for our own enjoyment : who would not desire to be in such a state as this ? who would place earthly good in competition with this ? Here indeed, brethren, is a remedy for all the troubles and ills of the present life. The man who has put his trust in God, and cast himself upon His mercy in Christ Jesus, and who believes that God for Christ's sake loves him, can walk abroad into the world, and mingle in its business, if need be, clad in armour that is proof both against its allurements and its trials. When deceived by his friends, he can oppose to this the feeling that God's love is unchangeable ; when disappointed in his schemes, he can rise from his depression by the thought that God is able to keep what he has committed to Him ; and when sickened by the ingratitude and the waywardness of men, he can still betake himself to God, and feel as sweet a satisfaction in the feeling that God is his Father and his friend, as if his head were really pillowed upon the breast of the Eternal One. The sense of God's favour and love, then, we place as the first element in the enjoyment of Him.

And now I remark further, in the second place, that another element is the delightful feeling which His people cherish of His presence with them.

This is altogether different from the cold conviction at which philosophy arrives, that God is everywhere present, as well as from the feeling of the mere sentimentalist, who, while he pretends to trace God's workmanship in every flower, and His presence in every movement either of the moral or material

world, yet excludes Him from his own heart. The believer not only acknowledges in the beautiful language of the Psalmist that God compasses his path, and is acquainted with all his ways—that there is no escaping from His Spirit, or fleeing from His presence; but he delights to contemplate Him as present with himself personally, and feels a positive satisfaction in the thought of His presence with him. And the reason is obvious. The presence of God is to him the presence of a friend; and all the delight which flows from the free interchanging of our thoughts with those we love, and all the pleasing sympathies that are awakened by their society, does the believer experience as arising from the conviction that God is beside him. It is in this way that sacred ordinances are to him so interesting and so desirable. They bring Jehovah, as it were, so much nearer to him, and raise him so much nearer to Jehovah. The preaching of the word, or the reading of it in private, is valued by His people as bringing them more closely in contact with Him who is the supreme object of their affection. Prayer carries them to His very footstool, and the Lord's Supper places them beside Him. Thus their experience harmonizes with that of David: 'How amiable are Thy tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts! My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth, for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God.' The exercises of religion being in this manner felt by them to be so many channels through which God manifests Himself to them, and communicates specially the comfortable sense of His presence, are regarded not as mere duties to the discharge of which conscience or a sense of propriety binds them, but as privileges of the highest order,—as Solomon calls them, 'a banquet' spread for their refreshment by the King of Zion, to compensate in the meantime for their not seeing Him face to face. But while in the ordinances of His own appointment God is peculiarly present with His people, and while their hearts, like those of the disciples of old, burn within them, and their devout and holy desires are especially kindled up amid the solemnities of His worship, the feeling of His presence is not with them confined to the sanctuary. They bear it about with them in the world, and are habitually influenced by it

in the management of their worldly business. It operates as a check upon the sinful thoughts which are ever ready to obtrude themselves upon the mind ; it spreads itself like oil over the little rufflings of the temper that would vent themselves in the angry reply or the sharp rebuke ; and it descends like a healing balm into the heart, soothing the cares and disquietudes that would terminate in depression or despondency. Who then, brethren, would not desire thus to live continually in God's society, to have the Holy One of Israel at his right hand, to walk in the light of God's countenance !

So much for the second element of which the enjoyment of God is composed. I now remark, in the third place, that another element of it is, our being made partakers of a divine nature.

This is the point that is chiefly alluded to by the Psalmist in the text. It is with reference to it that he says, ' They shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of Thy house ; and Thou shalt make them drink of the river of Thy pleasures. For with Thee is the fountain of life ; in Thy light shall we see light.' God by His Holy Spirit imparts to His people a resemblance to Himself, working in them all the graces that form the ornament of the Christian character, and bringing their will into a state of conformity to His own blessed will. This is what is usually called having communion with God, and it is the highest glory and happiness of which our nature is susceptible in the present life. All the moral attributes of Jehovah are impressed by the Spirit in the soul of man, so that he gradually becomes what he was before sin entered into the world—a being wearing the divine image. And as a necessary consequence of this, he is put in possession of a blessedness that bears some resemblance to that which he forfeited by his apostasy. For as misery always haunts the footsteps of sin, so happiness takes up her abode with holiness ; and in proportion as man is restored to the character, and influenced by the feelings, and moved by the affections which he exhibited in paradise previously to the fall, in the same proportion does he experience the pure enjoyment which he had in paradise. And besides the happiness which flows into the soul from the conscious possession of those graces that are



communicated by the Spirit, or, as I might say, besides the native happiness which the existence of holiness in the heart necessarily implies, the Scripture speaks of another source of enjoyment connected with the possession of the divine image: 'The Spirit Himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.' He shines upon His own workmanship, gladdening the heart, imparting a joy and peace that pass all understanding, elevating the affections toward God, and drawing the whole soul heavenward so gently, and yet so forcibly, that the tabernacle of clay sometimes seems too narrow for it. These are peculiarly the seasons of refreshment from the presence of the Lord to which the Scripture alludes, and it is at such seasons that the language of the Psalmist is caught up by the believer as an image of his own thoughts: 'Whom have I in heaven but Thee? and there is none in all the earth that I desire besides Thee. Flesh and heart may faint and fail; but Thou art the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.' And let it not be supposed that these spiritual joys which God sometimes communicates to His people on earth are the same thing with the raptures of enthusiasm. No, brethren, it is when the grace implanted in the heart is manifested in all the activities of the Christian life, when the believer is running with greatest steadfastness in the path of the divine commandments, and aiming most steadily at the promotion of God's glory,—it is then that the light of the Lord shines most brightly in his tabernacle, and that in this light he sees light.

Such, then, are the three elements of which we conceive the enjoyment of God on earth is made up,—a sense of His love and favour obtained from reconciliation with Him through Jesus Christ; a delightful feeling of His presence; and a participation in His moral perfections, or, as it may be otherwise expressed, the bearing of His image. In these things, we say, lies the chief happiness of man; in these only can the soul find a portion suitable to its immortal nature and its imperishable faculties. The world, indeed, may smile for a time upon its votaries, and dazzle them by its allurements, but satisfy them it cannot. And when they come to lie on the confines of eternity, they will be compelled to acknowledge that all is

vanity and vexation of spirit. On the other hand, it is then especially that those who have chosen God as their chief good will realize all that is implied in the enjoyment of Him. The sense of His favour which cheers them on earth will be clouded by no doubts and misgivings when they are acknowledged as His before the assembled universe; the feeling of His presence, which in this world is interrupted from time to time by worldly cares or the inroads of sin, will then be exchanged for the glorious vision of Immanuel; and the divine image in this life, formed but imperfectly, shall then be perfect; they shall be like Him, for they shall see Him as He is. But the eternal enjoyment of God, which is reserved for His people, we need not attempt to describe. The imperfection of human language to convey a clear conception of things spiritual, we have throughout the whole of this subject been reminded of; and it were needless to attempt to describe that which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath entered into the heart of man. God Himself is the portion of His people; the Most High is their habitation; and the highest aspirings of the human soul can neither aim at nor anticipate anything greater or more permanent. Amen.

## IV.

### FOLLOWING CHRIST.

‘Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me.’—JOHN XXI. 22.

OUR Lord, after having drawn from the Apostle Peter an explicit declaration of his love for Him, and after having pointed out to him the line of duty which he must pursue as an evidence of that love, proceeds in the eighteenth verse of the chapter to inform him, in terms which seem to have been fully understood by Peter himself and the rest of the apostles, how his earthly career was destined to be closed: ‘When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and walkedst whither thou wouldst; but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldst not. This spake He, signifying by what death Peter should glorify God.’ Here there was a manifest allusion made to a death of violence. The apostle’s hands were to be bound like a criminal’s, as his Master’s had been; and he was to be carried forth to suffer publicly, as his Master, too, had been before him. And so it afterwards was, the event completely verifying the Saviour’s prediction. Now it is exactly in harmony with all that we know of the character of Peter, that the announcement thus made to him should not daunt his bold and ardent spirit. On one occasion only he had been betrayed by fear into the guilt of denying his Lord; but at all other times he was ready to encounter any danger, yea, sometimes he was even reckless in courting it. And so in the case before us, he heard with the utmost calmness the termination of his own course foretold; and proceeded to question the Lord what would be the destiny of John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, and toward whom he had exhibited

many proofs of peculiar affection. At the twenty-first verse he asks, pointing to John, 'Lord, and what shall this man do?' The question as it here stands does not accord so completely with the general bearing of the narrative as it would do if the original words were rendered thus, which they might have been most properly: 'Lord, and what shall be the fate of this man?' The Saviour did not think fit to satisfy the curiosity of Peter on this occasion; but answered in the words of the text, 'If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me.' The meaning of these words was not apprehended by the disciples at the time, for we are told that there went forth among them a saying that that disciple should not die. They overlooked the important fact which Jesus had told them before, that He was to come to take vengeance upon the Jewish nation for their hardened unbelief and wickedness, as well as to judge the world at the last day. And interpreting what He said respecting John with reference to the last of these events, they imagined that he was not to taste of death at all. But Christ, as John himself here says, had not intimated that His servant was not to die; but had only meant to repress the curiosity of Peter, by telling him that it was no concern of his although the life of his fellow-labourer should be prolonged until He came to inflict His threatened judgments upon the guilty nation that had rejected His offered mercy. Accordingly we know that John did live for a considerable time after Jerusalem was destroyed, and the Jews were scattered abroad among all nations, and many years after Peter had put off his tabernacle, as the Lord Jesus had shown unto him. These remarks will suffice for the explanation of the mere language of the text, and of the surrounding context; and now I would wish to direct your attention more particularly to the important practical truth which the text brings before us: 'If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me.' The general import of the words is obviously this: that Christians have nothing to do with those vain speculations which, even if they could be satisfactorily carried out, would only tend to gratify idle curiosity; that they must be contented to remain in ignorance of many things which they

may think it desirable to know, and to pursue the path of duty as plainly revealed in the word of God. The same truth, or at least substantially the same truth, is set before us in another place, as evolved in circumstances very similar to those alluded to in the text. The disciples on one occasion asked the Saviour whether there would be few people saved. The question respected a point with which they had personally no concern; and therefore, instead of answering it, He said, 'Strive ye to enter in at the strait gate.' As if He had said: Whether there be few saved, or many, rests upon God's purpose; let it be your object to endeavour to be found among the number. There might be many profitable lessons drawn from the important truth stated in the text; but what I would wish to accomplish is, in the first place, to point out what is to be understood by following Christ; and in the second place, to advert to the frame of spirit in which He is to be followed. These are the two topics which seem to be most plainly deducible from the words, 'If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me.'

I. In the first place, then, what is to be understood by following Christ?

In this is manifestly summed up the whole character of a Christian; and perhaps it would be impossible to find any language so well fitted to convey a clear and practical impression of what a Christian ought to be as these words do. Let us carry ourselves back in thought to a short period after the Saviour's resurrection, and suppose ourselves listening to the conversation of a few persons who were commenting upon the character and views of certain others, and endeavouring, to use a familiar expression, by comparing notes to ascertain whether this and that one could be called a disciple of Jesus. They are speaking, for instance, of Nicodemus as a person supposed to favour the Christian cause; and one says that there is a strong presumption to be gathered to this effect, from the fact that on one occasion he went secretly to Jesus in the night-time, and held a long conversation with him. Another says that the presumption is heightened by the circumstance that, when the council were

anxious to lay hold of Jesus soon after the commencement of his public ministry, Nicodemus was the only person who ventured to throw in a word in his defence: 'Doth our law judge any man before it hear him, and know what he doeth?' And another says that it is all but certain that Nicodemus must be a follower of Christ, because he was with the party who took charge of the body of Jesus after it was taken down from the cross, and wound it in linen clothes, with spices, before it was laid in the sepulchre. Altogether, therefore, they come to the conclusion, that if Nicodemus is not wholly a Christian, he is at least to be suspected of Christianity, because he had been in Christ's company, because he had spoken in his defence, and because he had shown respect for his memory. Again, the case of Peter, we shall suppose, is canvassed. One testifies that he saw him again and again with Christ, from the time that his fame first began to be noised abroad; that he was known to be present during the delivery of most of Christ's discourses; that he went about in obedience to Christ's orders, to proclaim the coming of the kingdom of God; that he was habitually in Christ's society; that he had left his former profession to wait upon Christ; and that at the very time when Christ was apprehended in the garden, he was seen among the few who then were with him, and who were understood to be his most devoted adherents. Another, however, might reply, that although there was much in all this to fasten upon Peter the imputation of being a follower of Christ, there was much also to render that doubtful. Did I not hear him, he might say, with my own ears, in the palace of the high priest, and in the presence of Christ when he stood at the bar, deny that he knew him, or had any connection with him? And is there not another case very similar to this—that of Judas, who, although he attended Christ as constantly as Peter during the whole of His ministry, and sat as often at the same table with Him, and went about, too, declaring that the kingdom of heaven was at hand, yet afterwards became weary of his employment, and conducted the people who apprehended Christ in the garden? Yes, another might reply, all this is very true; but I was present in the hall of judgment when Peter disavowed

all knowledge of Jesus of Nazareth, and all fellowship with him; and I observed that when Jesus turned about, as he did, and looked upon Peter, he went out and wept most bitterly. And he was afterwards known to go to the sepulchre where Jesus was buried, on the morning when he is said to have risen again, and since that time to have kept company with the few who still espouse his cause. Yea, and who is so forward as this man now in preaching in the streets of Jerusalem, and declaring that Jesus is both Lord and Christ? Putting all things together, therefore, the conclusion they come to is, that Peter must be regarded as one of Christ's followers, notwithstanding of the suspicion which is thrown over his character by the fact that he denied his Lord. I might pursue this train of remark much further, but it is unnecessary. My object in entering upon it was to bring out broadly the principles on which men would have judged whether or not any one was a follower of Christ in the first age of Christianity; because it is substantially according to the same principles that we must judge still what is meant by following Christ. To have been habitually in His society, going with Him where He went, and dwelling where He dwelt; to have manifested obedience to His commandments; to have been influenced by His discourses; to have adhered to Him in the midst of His trials and sufferings; to have openly espoused His cause when it seemed to be desperate, and to have endured reproach and suffering for His sake, were the great external marks of His undoubted followers in the first age of the church; and making all due allowance for the difference of circumstances on account of His personal absence, they are the great external marks of His undoubted followers now. Yea, and besides this, it will be manifest to every one who reflects upon the subject, that, from the illustrations that have been given above, there may be deduced certain principles which, if followed out, would enable us to discriminate between the genuine and the false follower of Christ. Judas was with Him so long as it served his own purposes; he was with Him while the hosannas of the populace encouraged the hope that temporal advantage was to be gained in His service; there was nothing to distinguish

him from the rest of the apostles while the people, astonished by His miracles and melted by His doctrine, were ready to acknowledge Him as the long-promised Messiah. But we look for him in vain among the faithful few in the garden: he appears there in the midst of the Saviour's enemies, as the guide to those who dragged Him to the tribunal and to Calvary. And thus it is with many still. They are Christians in the calm, when their professions expose them to no peculiar inconvenience or disadvantage; but when the storm breaks forth, and when profession lies in the way to reproach and to suffering, they will be Christians no longer. The follower of Christ—to repeat again the marks by which he would have been known in the primitive age—is one who delights in Christ's society; who walks behind Him wherever He goes; who does what He commands; and who is not ashamed to avow his connection with Him, be the consequences what they may. Now from these general observations I would proceed to state briefly one or two of the more prominent features of the character of a follower of the Lord, and which may be deduced from the remarks made above.

1. And in the first place, I observe that the follower of Christ must be of one spirit with his Master.

This lies at the foundation of the whole subject. We always conclude that there is similarity of mind and disposition and temper among parties who come together voluntarily,—who continue to associate, and who follow the same train of pursuits. Whatever the object may be which they aim at, we always feel warranted in drawing the inference that they must be of kindred spirit when they *continue* knit together for the accomplishment of it. Men may be carried away by sudden impulses to put their hand to works which they afterwards repent of, and to join in associations which they afterwards see cause to condemn; but then they quit the fellowship into which they had been thoughtlessly led. Long and unbroken co-operation indicates fraternity of mind and of principle. Now there is a remarkable peculiarity to be noted with respect to the unity of feeling and of pursuit in the case of Christians, which, as the followers of the Lord Jesus, they must be supposed to cherish along with Him. And it is



this: there is originally no sympathy or community of pursuit between the Saviour and any of the human race. Their loves and their enmities, their desires and their aversions, are diametrically opposite; and therefore there must be a great spiritual change wrought upon a man before he can be of one spirit with the Lord. To go again to the primitive church for an illustration, there could not be imagined a more thorough discrepancy between two beings than there was originally between Jesus the Son of God and Peter the fisherman of Galilee, even only an hour before the latter became the follower of the former, and of one spirit with Him. In point of feeling, of affection, of desire, of pursuit, and of aim, the two were wholly and thoroughly dissimilar. Peter went forth in the morning in his little boat, accompanied with the partners of his toils and profits, to gain a livelihood for himself and his family. His thoughts were bounded by his dependent occupation. The earning of a day's wages was all that he contemplated when he left his home; and the idea of his taking a part in the evangelization and enlightening of the world, in carrying the knowledge of God to the Gentiles, in braving synagogues and councils, and swaying the opinions of countless multitudes, both high and low, and being received into intimate fellowship with the long-expected Messiah, and having the mystery which had been hid from ages and generations revealed to him, and being honoured to die a martyr for those truths which are destined to regenerate the world,—such an idea broke not in upon the current of his thoughts; and had it been hinted at, he would have laughed at it as the offspring of a maniac fancy. But as he plied his task, there came along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, in humble guise, an individual, in outward appearance nothing more than man, who cried to him, ‘Peter, follow me, and I will make thee a fisher of men;’ and the obedient fisherman deserted his boat and his nets, and entered on all those glorious enterprises that have been specified,—the very things on which Christ's heart was set,—being from that moment of one spirit with the Lord. Now, although in outward respects there may not in many cases be such a perceptible difference between the condition of the follower of Christ before he begins to follow Him and

his condition afterwards as in the case of Peter, there is a difference as real. The fisherman of Galilee, in his narrow views, and contracted national feelings, and paltry aims, was not more different from the apostle with enlightened mind, and enlarged charity, and heavenly aspirations, than is the man of the world who is ignorant of Christ, and the same man when he becomes His follower. And wherein lies the change?—by what agency is the transformation wrought? In both cases by the self-same agency, the power of the Holy Spirit. It was He who sent the Saviour's call home to the heart of Peter, who enlightened his understanding, who directed his zeal into a proper channel, who subdued his heart, and made him of one mind with Christ. And it is the agency of the same sovereign Spirit that turns men now from being worshippers of mammon to be worshippers of God,—that subdues the enmity of their hearts to the gospel,—that leads them to admire Christ, and to love Him, and to honour Him,—and that makes them of one mind with Him, and thus disposes them to follow Him. The Spirit dwelt in the *man* Christ Jesus, and He dwells in all His people. The Spirit is the bond of union between Him and them. Under His influence there are desires kindled up within them congenial to those by which Christ on earth was animated; their affections are brought to harmonize with Christ's, and they are made to feel that the great object which Christ kept ever before Him—the glorifying of His heavenly Father—is the object at which *they* ought to aim supremely. And so, with the Spirit thus dwelling in them and working in them, they just acquire the very temperament, or, if we may so call it, the very soul that fits them for becoming the followers of the Lord Jesus. In one word, if we would follow Christ, we must begin with regeneration—we must be renewed by the Holy Spirit.

2. Now from this I proceed to remark, in the second place, that to follow Christ implies our making what was Christ's work our work.

Step for step the apostles went with their Master while He pursued His career of benevolence, doing good to the souls and bodies of men; and when He was removed from them, they

persevered in the same course as if He had been with them still. Were we to define in as few words as possible what was Christ's work on earth, we would say that it consisted in the doing of His Father's will, which He tells us was His meat and His drink, or more particularly, in the glorifying of God by working out the salvation of lost sinners. In the same terms, therefore, may be defined the work of His followers, or the course which they have to pursue. They only walk in their Master's footsteps when they seek to do the will of God, and when they endeavour, within the peculiar sphere of their influence, to save sinners from perdition. It is not indeed meant here, that men should leave their occupations, and go forth as the apostles did to call sinners to repentance. This lies not to their hand, unless they are specially called of God to that work. But if they would follow Christ, they must lay their own inclinations prostrate before the divine law, and take it as the rule of their conduct; they must learn to combat and to set aside those feelings which would lead them to postpone the calls of duty, and to listen to the promptings of selfishness; and they must use what influence and opportunities they have to bring others under the power of the truth. I do not know by what delusive fancies that man must be possessed, who conceives himself to be a follower of Christ, and yet has no heart for promoting the eternal well-being of his fellow-sinners; nor by what arguments he can make it out that he is walking in the path which Christ trode, if he has never made an attempt to gain over one individual, whether related to him or not, to the side of truth and of righteousness. He may urge the plea that he does no harm to any one, but pursues his way calmly and quietly, and endeavours to fulfil the duties of his station; but this is not to live a life like Christ's. The Saviour was not a passive beholder of the ills that encompass humanity, nor did He stand aloof from the misery that He saw around Him. He went into the midst of it, carrying with Him a sovereign remedy for every form of man's distemper, bringing light to dissipate the darkness, comfort for the sorrowful, hope for the desponding, and life to the dead. But is it necessary, it will be said, that we should endeavour to act in these respects as He did?

Certainly, we answer, if you would be His followers. It may be so ordered in the providence of God that you cannot make these things *your proper* occupation. Your field of duty in doing the will of God may rather lie in submission to trials and privations, than in any active offices of good to others. But look, brethren, to the conduct of those who are the servants of sin and Satan, and take a lesson from them. How readily do wicked men find opportunity to advance the cause they serve, and how many words do they put in for their master, and how perseveringly do they strive to make others as wicked as themselves; while those who call themselves the servants of Christ can spend a long life without one attempt to commend Christ's cause to others, without having once spoken a word decidedly in His behalf, and without having made a single effort to press one beside them into His service! Let each man's conscience judge how this can be reconciled with the fact of his being a follower of the Son of God.

3. But, in the third place, I remark, that to follow Christ implies a habitual endeavour on our part to imitate Him, or to be like Him.

One great reason for which so large a portion of the word of God is occupied with the history of Christ's doings, and with an account of the spirit by which He was animated both in His public and private life, is that we may have the great model fully set before us to which we must be assimilated. And one object which every Christian must incessantly endeavour to accomplish, is to bring his whole temper into a frame like that of Christ, and to be pure even as Christ is pure. What a gloomy world this would be, some will be ready to think, if people should always aim at this attainment, and if there should be universally prevalent the desire to imitate the Saviour! How heavily would the time hang on one's hands, and how impossible it would be to render life comfortable, or even tolerable! Then, brethren, to such people the prospect of heaven as it is described in the word of God must be exceedingly uncomfortable, and the occupations of its inhabitants full of misery. For all who are there are like Christ, and their employments are suitable to the likeness.

But it is the carnal mind only that connects the idea of gloom and of misery with resemblance to the Son of God. The mind renewed by grace sees nothing therein but blessedness. To be like Christ is to be surely and completely happy; and it is from his consciousness of the vast disproportion between what he has attained and the perfect model presented to him in the character of Christ, that the principal disquietude of the Christian on earth springs. He cannot rest satisfied with his own meagre attainments. The immeasurable height of holiness which he has yet to climb rises up before him; the footmarks of his Lord are there pointing out to him the way; while others are sitting down contented on the little eminences which lie around the bottom of the arduous steep, and looking down upon the place below, forgetful of the boundless range above, are satisfied with the height they have already gained, the prints of the Redeemer's feet tell *him* that he has higher and higher yet to go. The summit which he seeks is lost in heaven, but still he perseveres. As he advances, he breathes a purer and fresher atmosphere; he is encouraged by others who are, like himself, toiling up the ascent. While he rises, the world is more and more shut out from him; he disencumbers himself of the weights which press him down; and at length, after all his toil and pain, he gains the final resting-place. Without a figure, to be a follower of Christ is to aim at universal holiness.

4. In the fourth place, I remark, that to follow Christ implies separation from the sinful pursuits of the world.

While the Lord Jesus mingled freely with all classes of men, and was no enemy to innocent enjoyment, He was at the same time the determined and uncompromising enemy of the spirit which the world breathes. Unlike John the Baptist, He came eating and drinking like other men, and scorned not to partake of entertainments provided for Him by those who were designated sinners, where He met only with people to whom the same name was applied. But still the great principle which influenced Him was, that He might have opportunity of publishing the truths which He was sent into the world to make known, and of bringing within the reach of those who would have otherwise been excluded the offer

of salvation. It is no uncommon thing to hear those who uphold and patronize what are called fashionable amusements, assert that there is nothing in the Scripture to condemn them, and refer to the example of the Saviour as affording a warrant to His followers not to deny themselves the ordinary enjoyments of life. But let it be observed *first*, that it was only in the common enjoyments of social intercourse that Jesus took a part, and that even there His object was to fulfil the purposes of His mission. And let it be noticed *next*, that in scenes of gaiety, in the place of vain show, Christ's foot was never placed; and that the whole spirit of His gospel is decidedly opposed to them. Let this maxim be fairly acted on, that we never take part in any pleasure where we feel that we cannot carry Christ's presence with us, and it will give a death-blow to the frivolities and amusements in which the children of vanity seek their happiness.

5. In the fifth place, I observe, that to follow Christ is to bear the cross.

‘Whosoever will be my disciple, let him renounce himself, take up his cross, and follow me.’ There is no promise made in the Scripture to the effect that, in maintaining a Christian profession, we shall be exempted from tribulation. On the contrary, we are commanded to expect it. *Inward* peace and joy are held forth in the promise, but outward suffering of some species or other usually forms an ingredient in the Christian's cup. *That* suffering, whatever it may be, is the cross we are commanded to bear, and we must not shrink from it. Jesus on earth was the man of sorrows: He was made perfect through suffering, and He hath exhorted us that it is through much tribulation we must enter into the kingdom of God. If our principles are so pliant, that we will fall into the views of any in whose company we may happen to be, rather than subject ourselves to inconvenience or to ridicule by upholding the truth; if our Christian faith is so accommodating, that we shall hold or reject any doctrine at the bidding of men, we may make what professions we please, but Christ will not recognise us as His: for whosoever is ashamed of Him and of His word on earth, He will be ashamed of when He comes in judgment.

II. Many more particulars might have been mentioned as involved in the idea of following Christ, but the time forbids. I shall now only offer a few remarks, in conclusion, on what was laid down as the second thing to be considered, viz. the frame of spirit in which Christ is to be followed. 'If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me.'

It is manifest from these words that Christ will not have His people know everything, although He makes all known to them that concerns their happiness and their salvation. It was Satan that promised boundless knowledge to the unhappy Eve; Christ makes no such promise.

1. And here therefore I remark, first, that it is with the most implicit faith that Christ must be followed.

There are many difficulties in the course of the Christian's pilgrimage which tend to perplex him, and which he would often desire to have solved. When he sees the ungodly prospering in the way; when he beholds the schemes of righteous men baffled, and the designs of the wicked successful; when he feels himself involved in trouble because he will not let go truth and a good conscience; when, by some dark and inexplicable dispensation, he is doomed to see his favourite hopes blasted, there is much in all this that prompts to the inquiry, 'Lord, wherefore should it be so?' The answer of Christ is, 'What is that to thee? follow thou me.' Pursue thou the path of duty, leaving all these dark and doubtful matters to be brought to light in God's good time. And surely, if Christ is worthy to be trusted and followed at all, He is worthy to be trusted with the secrets of His providence until He shall see fit to reveal them. Follow ye Him, or rather put your hand in His, for He guideth His people by the hand; and what ye know not now ye shall know hereafter. It is by faith, and not by sight, that the Christian must walk; and shall I commit my soul to Christ's keeping, believing that He is able to *keep* what I have committed to Him against that day, and scruple to take it for granted that all my other concerns are safe in His hand?

2. Once more, it is with most submissive humility that Christ must be followed.

The child following its parent, or with its hand locked in its parent's, is an emblem of the believer following Christ, or walking with Him, and is illustrative at once of faith and of humility. The language of faith is, I am satisfied not to know what Christ has not thought it proper to reveal; the language of humility is, I do not wish to know it. The language of faith with respect to the roughness of the path which leads to heaven is, It is a *hard path*; but as it is of God's ordering, it is no doubt the best. The language of humility is, The road is rough, but it is good enough for me. Under the combined influence of these kindred graces, the Christian holds on his way, following his Lord; and in God's good time he attains the end of his faith, even the salvation of his soul. Amen.



## V.

### THE SECURITY OF CHRIST'S PEOPLE.

‘Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.’—ROM. VIII. 34.

**I**N this rich and comprehensive passage, the apostle sets forth the security which Christ's people enjoy that they shall never perish, neither shall any pluck them out of His hand. And I do not know, brethren, where any troubled soul seeking rest and comfort for itself, amid the tossings of doubt and of a weak faith, could better cast anchor than at this passage.

There are many sources from which condemnation comes.

I. First, the sinner finds it *in himself*, and that in two respects.

1. In his own conscience.

When a sense of sin is truly brought home to a man's conscience, he stands self-condemned. He finds no plea to justify him, or to palliate his offence, *within himself*. He is constrained to write bitter things against himself, as having sinned wilfully, having violated every principle of gratitude, and having *knowingly* done the things which make him worthy of death. If there were no other source of condemnation than that which rises in the heart of the transgressor himself, it would be sufficient to make him miserable. And hence the strong expressions which are employed in the Scripture by the people of God when bewailing their iniquities. The Psalmist compares himself to the owl, which by its discordant scream wakes the dull echo on some sequestered tree; inasmuch as he had been driven by the sense of his iniquities to withdraw himself even from the business of life, and to

mourn in secret over his transgressions. In many places we find him crying out in the bitterness of his spirit on account of his sins, and describing the feverish restlessness which his convictions had occasioned him, as changing his moisture into the drought of summer. He would have answered at once the question in the text, Who is he that condemneth? in words similar to those which the apostle uses: 'My own heart condemneth me; and God is greater than my heart, and knoweth all things.'

2. But, again, there is another accuser of whom we must also speak as *within* the sinner; and that is the wicked one, who is called in Scripture the accuser of the brethren. This spirit of darkness—the father of lies—finds it sometimes in accordance with his policy to endeavour to deepen the remorse of the convicted sinner so as to drive him to despair. And this we speak not without authority, for the Scripture has informed us of his doings in this respect, that we may not be ignorant of his devices. He entered into Judas Iscariot, that is, he took full possession of him, that he might use him without control as his instrument. And what was the effect of his suggestions in the mind of the traitor after the deed of treachery was done? Nothing else than to make him think that he had sinned beyond forgiveness. He *sometimes hardens* the sinner, when by that means he can draw him into his snares; but in this case he had effected his purpose sufficiently, and accordingly he whetted the arrow of conviction, yea, poisoned it, as we may say, that he might at once make sure of his victim. And thus the wretched Judas sank under the stroke; and imagining that he had sinned so that he could not be pardoned, he went and hanged himself. With such a specimen, then, before us of the influence of Satan, we feel warranted to refer to him as condemning the sinner, partly by giving him so strong representations of his guilt that he finds the burden insupportable, and partly by endeavouring to shut out from his view any glimpse of God's mercy in Christ, by which alone relief can be brought to his soul. And therefore it would be well if those who are haunted by deep convictions would remember, that it cannot be a voice from the divine word which would suggest to them

that they are *utterly* beyond the reach of mercy, but rather the insidious whisper of the crafty adversary, whose object is attained when he can persuade any one that he is irremediably condemned—that there is no hope for him in God !

II. But further, secondly, there is condemnation to the sinner from *without*; and here also in two respects.

1. First, the law of God condemns him, and *that* whether he is conscious of the fact or not. Its verdict is, that every one who offendeth in one point is guilty of all, and for this reason, that the law rests on the authority of the lawgiver; and therefore every transgression of it, however small in appearance, is tantamount to a contempt of that authority, and therefore incurs the punishment due to any one who sets at nought the supremacy of Jehovah. Supposing, then, that any one were so blinded through the deceitfulness of sin as to imagine that he had not done anything that could expose him to the divine vengeance, or that he were so buoyed up by a false estimate of his own deservings as to think that he had done so much more good than evil, that he could have nothing to dread, still the sentence of the law would stand against him; and while he was saying, 'Peace, peace,' the law would be collecting all its thunders to overwhelm him. And it is no empty threatening that it utters: no voice of terror, just to alarm for a moment, and no longer; but a voice which, though lost amid the bustle of business, will come back again,—though stilled by false arguments, will again make itself be heard,—though drowned by worldly pleasure and dissipation, will again break out,—though lost in this world, will peal forth again in the next. My brethren, I suspect there is some reason to fear lest in the very preaching of the gospel there should be occasion taken by men to deceive themselves respecting this awfully momentous subject. In the narrow compass of one discourse we have to speak of law threatenings and gospel promises; and this of necessity, since we dare not tell people of the danger that hangs over them without pointing at the same time to the refuge. But just because the two things are thus closely brought together, it may be imagined by some of the hearers that the threatenings may be as easily disposed of in their particular case as they

seem to be in the general; and they may go away with the impression, that though the law did once issue a sentence of condemnation, that sentence is now wholly reversed by the gospel, and is referred to rather as something that *was* in force, than as anything that *now* holds. But this is not the truth. The condemnation of the law rests upon every one who believeth not in Christ Jesus. And though, in answer to the question, Who is he that condemneth? it should be said, Man has no charge to bring, and conscience has little to urge; yet there is a higher accuser than either,—the unchangeable law, which ceases not to condemn, and *will* not cease to condemn, every descendant of Adam who has not been freed from its sentence through the believing acceptance of the Lord Jesus Christ. For there is no freedom from its condemnation, except in the one way which is opened up by the atonement of Christ.

2. But once more, God the judge of all condemns the sinner. Every right conception we are enabled to cherish of God leads to the conclusion that He is the avenger of sin, and His own word places the matter yet more clearly before us. The Bible records various judgments executed against the workers of iniquity; and there is nothing said in the New Testament to afford the smallest ground for the belief that any change has been produced upon the determination of Jehovah with respect to the punishment of sin since the gospel dispensation was introduced. Nay, if there be any difference between the threatenings of the Old Testament and those of the New, it is to the effect that sin will be more dreadfully visited in the latter case than it was in the former. 'If he that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses, of how much sorer punishment shall he be thought worthy who hath trampled under foot the Son of God, and counted the blood of the covenant an unholy thing!' 'There remaineth now *no more sacrifice* for sin, but a certain looking for of judgment and fiery indignation which shall devour the adversaries.' These are the terms in which the Lawgiver of the universe issues His will regarding sinners under the New Testament dispensation; and according to the same rule will the final judgment be regulated. So that the gospel pro-

mulgates no general act of pardon against all offences and all offenders, as if the Sovereign Judge had ceased from all controversy with this world of ours. But only to those who believe in Jesus, and place confidence in Him as their deliverer from threatened wrath, is there any remission of guilt proposed. 'Let God be true, and every man a liar;' 'The soul that sinneth, it shall die.'

But this is a very important matter; and I would not, brethren, that you should suppose it rested upon the opinion of man. Listen, then, to the infallible word: 'Though hand join in hand, the wicked shall not be unpunished.' 'Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.' There is no respect of persons with God. There is condemnation then written by the Judge of all the earth against the transgressors of His law, for the inflicting of which His own veracity is pledged. And although the voice of conscience should be stifled by false remedies; and although the enemy, to serve his own purposes, should cease for a time to produce alarm; and although the declarations of the law should be regarded as having no force under the dispensation of mercy; yet all this cannot alter the truth, that evil shall not dwell with God, but that His throne shall be set for judgment, to assign indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, to every soul of man that doeth evil. Then how shalt *thou* escape? I ask at each one now present. You have heard the condemnation; how shall you get free from it? Certainly not on account of the mere circumstance that Christ has made atonement for sin, and that you know on what terms the benefits of His atonement are to be enjoyed. That will not save. For innumerable multitudes have gone down into perdition with the full knowledge that Christ came into the world to save sinners, and in the enjoyment of all the *outward* privileges which the gospel dispensation brings along with it. In what manner, then, are we to obtain deliverance from this fourfold condemnation under which we all naturally lie? I answer, not by merely *knowing*, but by *believing*, the testimony which God hath given concerning His Son—by receiving or embracing Christ by faith. It is this which places us in security; and it is those only that believe who can give the

answer written in the text to the question, Who is he that condemneth? 'It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again; who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.' And now, therefore, let us look at this immoveable ground of the believer's security as expressed in these words. Here I shall take occasion to show, first, in what an impregnable fortress the believer is secured by those four lines of argument or defences which the apostle here erects around him; and then I shall endeavour to bring the collective force of the argument to bear upon such as are weak in the faith.

(1.) To the question, then, Who is he that condemneth? the believer can answer, first, There is no condemnation, because '*it is Christ that died.*' The death of the Redeemer provides in point of law full immunity from the punishment of sin for all who believe upon His name. And so the Scripture says: 'God hath set forth His Son to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past.' The subject can even be reduced to the plainest reasoning, as it is set before us in the word of God. Christ is said to have given His life a ransom for many. This implies that the many were lying in a state of spiritual captivity, and that there was some claim against them on the part of the Sovereign Judge, which they themselves could not satisfy so as to procure their release. In these circumstances Christ came into the world, according to the terms of the covenant of grace, and gave payment of the price which was demanded—even life for life; and thus, according to every principle of justice, *the many*, all who believe, are set free from the bondage under which they groaned. The weakest intellect may comprehend this short reasoning; and happily it bears such an analogy to the ordinary transactions of life, that no person can be at any loss, at least as far as mere understanding is concerned, to perceive the bearing of it. Who is he that condemneth? is a question which the guilty conscience apart from Christ cannot hear proposed without trembling. *It* finds condemnation everywhere! But it is not in fear, it is in triumph, that this question is asked in the text. The apostle proposes it, that

he may at once and for ever put it at rest by the reply : It is Christ that died ! Believer, thou canst not be condemned, since Christ hath died for thee. If thou believest with all thine heart, it is as impossible for thee to be left in sin and guilt, and consigned to hell, as it is for the Most High to commit injustice. But, sinner, if thou dost *only think* that thou believest, if thy faith is only *a name*, without any change of nature or of character, then it is not Christ that *died*, but the law that *lives*, and its condemnation lives also ; and who shall deliver thee from that terrible destiny to which thou art so justly exposed ?

(2.) But, in the second place, to the question, Who is he that condemneth ? the believer can answer, I look to Christ that is risen again.

If Christ had not risen again, then our faith would have been vain ; no atonement would have been offered for sin. The whole evidence of the truth of Christianity rests upon the resurrection of Christ from the dead. Any one might have declared himself the saviour of sinners, and spoken of his death as the means of effecting their salvation. But there is no help to be expected from the dead ; and so it is the resurrection that seals the commission and the power of Jesus as sent to seek and to save that which was lost. The objection which was mockingly thrown out against our Lord as He hung upon the cross, ‘ He saved others, himself he cannot save,’ would have remained unanswerable, had not the glory of the resurrection wiped away the ignominy of the cross. For Christ could not have given life to others, had He not been able to save Himself. The great error of the objectors was, that they would have salvation without the price being paid for it—they would have the Messiah not die at all ; whereas God’s purpose was, that through death He should destroy him that had the power of death ; and it was His death that gave Him a right to dispense pardon and eternal life to His people. The resurrection is, in a word, the evidence we have that Christ’s work was sufficient for the ends it was designed to answer ; and that the ransom which He paid for sinners was accepted by the Sovereign Lawgiver as fully adequate to procure the redemption of those for whom it was

offered. Who is he that condemneth? Now it may well be asked, when God Himself has declared His satisfaction with the price paid for the deliverance of the captives. And so, believer, whosoever thou art that doubttest whether thou wilt escape from the wrath to come, here is thy security: Not only that Christ's life has been given for thine, but that Jehovah, who was justly incensed against thee, has accepted the substitution, and has therefore no longer any controversy with thee.

(3.) But thirdly, in answer to the question, Who is he that condemneth? the believer can reply, I appeal to Christ, who is even at the right hand of God.

The expression, He is at the right hand of God, is precisely equivalent to the declaration which He made Himself to the apostles before His ascension: 'All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.' And how full of comfort is this truth to all His people! The same Saviour who demonstrated His love for the church by appearing on earth in the form of a servant, and submitting to the death of the cross, now wields all power in the universe for the benefit of that church which He purchased with His own blood. And therefore, although the enemies by whom His people are surrounded are innumerable,—although their power is great, their craftiness exceeding deep, and their malignity unquenchable,—they never can prevail against them, or pluck them out of His hand. It is only, indeed, when we look at the power of Christ, as pledged for the defence and the deliverance of His people, that we can understand how creatures so weak in themselves, and so corrupt, should be able to wage successful warfare against principalities and powers, and the rulers of the darkness of this world, and spiritual wickedness in high places. The apostle unveils the mystery to us when he says, 'I can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me;' 'When I am weak, then am I strong;' 'Yet not I, but Christ who is in me.' The power, then, with which Christ is invested, and which He employs specially for the benefit of His people, may well prove a source of comfort and encouragement to them. The adversary has a strong arm, and he is as subtle as he is strong; but omnipotence is against him, and on the side of the believer. And to



imagine it possible for any one who has fled for refuge to Christ, according to His own invitation, to be dragged forth from that refuge and condemned, is to imagine that omnipotence should be worsted by the strength of a creature.

(4.) In the fourth place, in answer to the question, Who is he that condemneth? the believer can reply, 'It is Christ who maketh intercession.'

Here we are taught in what manner the power of Christ is chiefly exercised for His people's good. It is put forth in intercession; and that intercession cannot fail of its effect, because of the dignity and the merit of Him who makes it. It is in the way of an ascending climax that the apostle puts his four arguments here, and the last accordingly is the strongest. One might think that there could be no higher encouragement afforded to the believer than that which flows from the consideration that He who was once dead now liveth for evermore, and hath all power committed into His hand. Yet, as the humble Christian, under a deep sense of his own unworthiness, might sometimes be tempted to suppose that he is utterly beneath the regard of the exalted Mediator, the apostle strikes away even this unreasonable ground of despondency, by giving us the assurance that Christ, so far from forgetting His people, is employed in interceding for every one of them. His exaltation and the place of dignity He holds is not for his own benefit, but for theirs. And though the voice may seem to sound loudly in their ears, 'Condemn, condemn,'—and their own consciences may re-echo it,—there is a voice which comes forth from the mercy-seat above, soft and sweet, yet loud enough to drown the other, saying, 'Save from going down to the pit, I have paid the ransom. Father, I will that those whom Thou hast given me be with me where I am, that they may behold my glory which Thou hast given me.' Let this, then, be the consolation of the believer, and the anchor of his soul sure and stedfast: that Jesus is within the veil making intercession for him; and that it is as impossible for any of His little ones to perish, as for any one to hurl the Saviour from His throne. Such, then, are the arguments which the apostle advances to allay the fears and to invigorate the confidence of those who are weak in the faith.

II. Let me now endeavour for a moment to bring the collective force of these arguments to bear upon the desponding followers of Christ.

Some of these may now be hearing me, and I would ask them to contemplate for a moment the delightful statement which is contained in this precious passage. They are sometimes ready to say, when any of the peculiarly gracious promises of the divine word are brought under their notice, that such things are too excellent for *them*; and that it is only those who have made far greater advancement in knowledge and in grace than they, who can take the comfort of such assurances. One can hardly reprove with severity these humble remonstrances; but the text points out to us the way in which they are to be disposed of. What is the ground even of that *little hope* you are permitted to cherish? I would ask those who are troubled and downcast lest after all they should be cast away. What reason have you to cherish any hope at all toward God? The only answer to this question must be: Jesus Christ died for sinners, and it is through Him that I expect to obtain acceptance with God. The answer is right. It is in the death of Christ alone that any poor sinner first finds deliverance from his countless fears. It is at the cross of Calvary that the weary pilgrim is eased of his burden. But you have other grounds of hope than the *death of Christ*. The Saviour in whom you are called to place your confidence is not only a suffering, but a risen, an exalted, an interceding Saviour. And these four great characteristics are all brought together in the text, just to show you that it is your privilege to enjoy not *one*, but all the blessings which Christ in all the varied relations in which He stands toward His people is ready to confer upon them. Is Christ divided? the apostle asks of the Corinthians. Is Christ divided? I ask of you who doubt and despond. It is the same Jesus that died, who also rose and ascended, and intercedes. Have you received Him as He is offered?—have you placed confidence in Him for pardon, and acceptance, and eternal life? Then you have received Him under all those aspects in which the text presents Him to us. Look not then continually into the sepulchre, as if all your hope lay there; but turn your view

upwards, for the Saviour is in heaven, and in heaven to intercede for you, if you believe upon His name. Take, my brethren, take the comfort which is here held out for your acceptance. Christ is dishonoured when you doubt His power and willingness to save you. God is dishonoured when you refuse to trust to the veracity of His word. There is no promise greater than what is contained in this text; and if you have received Christ at all, you have received Him as here exhibited in all His fulness. Let me again call you to notice, in another and briefer form, the four things in the text, and four things connected with them:

The fear of punishment—Christ died.

The fear of death—Christ rose.

The fear of being overcome—Christ has all power.

The fear of not being admitted into heaven—Christ is there in our nature.

And now, finally, the subject must be applied as a stimulus to holiness. What Christ gives, He gives to be improved—to be turned to account for His glory. Remember the parable of the talents.

The death and resurrection and glorification of Christ are, among other purposes, designed to answer these: our death to sin, our rising with Him to holiness of life, and our being thus made fit for the endless glory.

Who is he that condemneth? There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus; with this as their character, that they walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. Amen.

## VI.

### THE WILLINGNESS, BEAUTY, AND NUMBER OF CHRIST'S PEOPLE.

‘Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning : thou hast the dew of thy youth.’—  
Ps. cx. 3.

**E**VERY one must feel that these are beautiful words ; but there is a certain vagueness about them, which we must make it our first object to remove. The verse, then, consists of two clauses. The first could not be more appropriately rendered than it is here : ‘Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy power, in the beauties of holiness.’ *There*, however, there should be a pause. The following part of the verse contains another statement respecting the number of those who are to be made willing in the day of power ; and it should run thus : The dew of thy youth shall be as the dew from the womb of the morning ; *i.e.*, Thy youths, who shall flock to Thy standard to follow Thee, shall be numerous as the drops of the dew in the morning. The text, then, may be read thus : ‘Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy power, in the beauties of holiness : Thy young men shall be numerous as the dew-drops from the womb of the morning.’ And from these words, as thus interpreted, I would address you on the present occasion.

The psalm celebrates the glory of Christ as Priest and King of His church ; a combination of offices which we find elsewhere alluded to in the Scripture. Thus Zechariah says : ‘Behold the man whose name is the Branch : even He shall build the temple of the Lord ; and He shall bear the glory, and shall sit and rule upon His throne ; and He shall be a Priest upon His throne : and the counsel of peace shall be between them both.’ It is the triumphs of this exalted personage who, like Melchizedek, at once swayed the sceptre and ministered at

the altar, that the inspired writer in this song of Zion predicts as if he had witnessed them. And, brethren, it is worth while to remark, even though it does lead us somewhat from the subject more immediately before us, that it is not without reason that the office of Christ as a Priest is here placed in immediate connection with His glory as a King, and with the conquests which, as a King, He wins. He was raised to the mediatorial throne through and in consequence of His ministry, if we may so speak, at the altar. 'Because He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, therefore God hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow.' Christ's right to reign as King over the holy hill of Zion, that is, over the church, was acquired by His giving of Himself a sacrifice that He might purchase that church with His own blood. And if He had not sustained the character and performed the duties of our Priest, even when He Himself was both the offerer and the victim, He would not have borne the title by which His people delight to hail Him—that of their Lord and Sovereign. 'He poured out His soul unto death; He was numbered with transgressors; He bare the sin of many; and therefore there was divided to Him a portion with the great, and a spoil with the strong.' 'For the suffering of death He was crowned with glory and honour.' Now let me observe here, that this account which the Scripture gives us of Christ's office of a King, as founded upon and exercised in right of His having first discharged the office of a Priest, and given Himself a sacrifice for sin, is in its practical bearings of the first importance. The Lord Jesus reigns, and as our rightful Sovereign demands our homage. The very place which He occupies, as having all power in heaven and in earth committed to Him, invests Him with a title to make this demand, and renders us guilty of rebellion if we refuse to comply with it. But it is not as armed with a right which He has *power* to enforce that our King advances His claim. Such an argument, though it might be employed, *He* does not employ. A successful usurper might point to the blood through which he has waded to the throne,—an awful demonstration of what he will do to

secure his possession of it,—as the most forcible method of overcoming any opposition that may be likely to rise up against his authority. But this is not Christ's method of gaining the homage of His subjects. He does indeed point to blood as marking out the path by which He has risen to the glory He now possesses; but it is not the blood of enemies whom He has slaughtered in His wrath, but His own precious blood, shed for the remission of the sins of many, that forms the ground of that argument whereby He seeks to secure the homage of His subjects. He suffered for us that He might acquire the right to reign over us; not to tyrannize and make us miserable slaves, but to set us free from the thralldom of sin and death. And, my brethren, who is prepared to resist the force of such an argument, and to reject the claims of Christ to the homage of his heart, when he beholds Him thus bearing the wounds which He received in achieving His own sovereignty and our freedom? Look at the blessed Jesus, from no impulse but that of love, submitting to all indignities and tortures for His people's sake, and say if He who suffered so much as the Priest of the church has not a title to reign as her King?

But now, to come nearer to the subject which is to occupy our meditations, I may notice first of all generally, that in the psalm from which the text is taken, Christ's kingly authority is presented to us under two different aspects. There are two classes of people spoken of as placed under His control,—those, namely, who are hostile to Him, the wicked who say, We will not have this man to reign over us, let us break his bands asunder, and cast away his cords from us; and those who are described as His true and faithful subjects. It is with reference to the first of these classes that it is said at the beginning of the psalm, 'Sit Thou at my right hand, until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool;' and at the fifth and sixth verses, 'The Lord at Thy right hand shall strike kings through in the day of His wrath. He shall judge among the heathen, He shall fill the places with the dead bodies; He shall wound the heads over many countries.' And it is the second class, Christ's faithful subjects, that are referred to in the text: 'Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy power, in the

beauties of holiness.' The same distinction between two classes is observed in the second Psalm, which also treats of Christ's kingly office. There are some there spoken of with respect to whom it is declared that He will break them with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel ; and others who are pronounced blessed, as putting their trust in Him. Let this be pondered seriously, for it is overlooked by many. Many people, looking to the statements which are given with regard to the mild and peaceful administration of the Messiah, and to the glory of His kingdom, as consisting in the diffusion of universal love and goodwill, and judging from the grace and kindness which pervaded His words and actions while He dwelt with men on earth,—many people feel as if there were an utter inconsistency between all this and the exercise of vengeance which is ascribed to Him in such passages as those which have been quoted. But have they forgotten that there is such an expression in the Scripture as the wrath of the Lamb ? Do they not know that, while Christ comes with the offer of mercy to all who will accept of it, He makes this the terrible alternative, that for those who will not embrace His offer there remaineth nothing but a fearful looking for of judgment ? And I ask if those are not righteously doomed to perdition who will not submit to the authority of Christ, but trample under foot the blood of the covenant, and count it an unholy thing ? Let none of *us* delude ourselves by the vain fancy that under the government of Christ punishment is unknown. He would not be a King if He had not power to crush His enemies as well as to protect and to bless His devoted and willing subjects.

In the meantime, however, we are to look at the bright side of the picture, and to contemplate not the destiny of those who refuse to submit to the King of Zion, but the happy condition and character of those who are peculiarly His own, the purchase of His blood, the fruit of the travail of His soul. The Psalmist in prophetic vision beholds Messiah going forth on His glorious expedition to bring this rebel world of ours into subjection to Jehovah, its rightful Sovereign. On the one hand He is opposed, and all His overtures of reconciliation are treated with contempt ; on the other hand He is welcomed

and adored. It is of those that welcome and adore that the text speaks when it says, 'Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy power, in the beauties of holiness; Thy young men shall be numerous as the dew-drops from the womb of the morning.' And now, in discoursing from these words, I would direct your attention to the following topics as suggested by them. In the first place, I would inquire what is to be understood by the description of Christ's people here given as a *willing* people. In the second place, I would advert to their decorations: they appear 'in the beauties of holiness.' In the third place, I would speak of their number: 'they are as the dew-drops from the womb of the morning.' And in the fourth place, I would request you to attend to the time and way in which they are made Christ's willing followers: it is 'in the day of His power.' May the Divine Spirit guide our meditations, and make them profitable to our souls.

I. In the first place, then, let us see what is meant by the expression that Christ's people are a *willing* people.

This indicates that a vast change has been made upon them; for there is no man *naturally* inclined to follow and to obey the Saviour. Although He comes to us not with anger in His countenance, or with threatenings on His lips, but with looks of tenderness and accents of mercy; although the offer which He holds out conveys every blessing that man needs to make him happy here and hereafter, even nothing less than the forgiveness of every sin, admission into God's family and friendship, deliverance from the bondage of iniquity, and from the yoke of Satan, and the enjoyment of eternal life; although no one can hear these blessings named without feeling that he needs them all, and few of us deny in so many words Christ's power and willingness to bestow them all; yet, strange to say, the offer is unheeded by the majority of men, and they remain unwilling to follow Christ: they will not come to Him that they might have life. It is true, indeed, that many, through the influence of fear, or from the power of habit and early education, do render to Christ a certain amount of outward service. This accounts for the respect which is paid to ordinances by mere nominal Christians, and for the observance of the



common proprieties and decencies of life in those communities where the truths of the gospel are proclaimed. But when we speak of Christ's people as a willing people, there is much more meant than that they honour the forms of religion and observe the ordinary proprieties of life. We might *all* advance a claim to be numbered among them, if these things could make it good. Let us therefore endeavour to arrive at a right understanding of this important matter. To be *willing*, then, in the sense in which the expression is used in the text, is to have the enmity of the carnal heart to Christ and to His law subdued and destroyed; so that the person in whom this change is wrought looks up to the Saviour with all affection, rejoices in the privilege of holding intercourse with Him by prayer and other means, and accounts the performance of duty not a toil, but a pleasure. When a man who is himself a stranger to the love of Christ reads of the sacrifices, the self-devotion, the labours of His people in the primitive age; and when he sees—alas, how imperfect the image!—a reflection of the same spirit in His genuine disciples now; when he perceives the Christian, without any worldly motive or interest, spending and being spent for Christ, devoting time, and talents, and money, to the advancement of Christ's cause; when he beholds men whose powers of mind would have raised them to honour and affluence in their own land, leaving behind them friends and worldly prospects, and embarking their very life in the enterprise of spreading the truth of God among the victims of idolatry and debasing superstition; when a man a stranger to the love of Christ sees or reads of such instances of heroic devotion to the Saviour, he wonders how any should be found voluntarily to make such sacrifices, and to encounter such trials. And certainly, were he in his present state of mind, and with his present feelings, to attempt to act upon the principle of Christian devotedness, and to yield to the restrictions which Christ's law imposes both upon the heart and the conduct, he would be of all men the most miserable. His life would be that of a slave dragged to his task, and stimulated only by the scourge. But that which makes the difference in the case of the believer is, that he loves Christ and His service also. It is not of constraint, but with a

willing mind, that he renounces the pleasures which Christ's word condemns, and enters upon the duties which it inculcates. The Holy Spirit has brought him to see and to appreciate the love of Christ for *him*; and he now feels that he cannot do enough for Christ. And so, while he climbs the steep ascent of Christian duty, it is not with reluctance and regret, as if he were leaving in the world beneath him all that deserves to be called enjoyment. On the contrary, every step he takes he breathes more free; every difficulty he overcomes makes him more ready for another; the further he removes from those carnal pleasures which once engrossed him, the more intense and pure his satisfaction grows; and the secret of the whole is, that the Spirit has made him willing. He loves his Master, and he loves His work; and in such a case there can be no complaint, no murmuring.

Let it, however, be particularly noticed here, that the willingness which has been spoken of as characterizing the people of Christ is not to be regarded as a mere point of doctrinal theology, but as a great practical reality. Our catechism, you know, speaks of the renewing of the will as one part of the Spirit's work, and it is indeed the work upon which the salvation of the sinner turns. But what we are concerned about at present is not *the proof* of this doctrine. Many people may be satisfied with the mere knowledge of the doctrine, and may think that they are far advanced when they can describe the effects which the Spirit produces upon the heart in making a sinner willing to serve Christ, who before served only his own appetites and passions; but it is of a practical matter we speak, of a willingness manifested in action, and not confined to the mere definition of terms. Let me illustrate it.

We read in the Gospels of a centurion who came to Jesus beseeching Him to heal his servant, and grounding his plea upon this, that Christ must have the power to perform this cure as invested with God's authority; because he himself (the centurion) was a man under authority, having soldiers under him; and he could say to one, Go, and he went; and to another, Come, and he came; and to his servant, Do this, and he did it. The description which this centurion gives of his

household is exactly that which may be given of the family of Christ. *He* says to one, Go, and he goeth; and to another, Do this, and he doeth it. 'Speak, Lord, Thy servant heareth;' 'Here, am I, send me,' is the language of the believer. No matter though the work be difficult; no matter though it demand a measure of self-renunciation too severe in the estimate of a selfish and worldly-minded man; no matter though it subject the follower of the Lord to trouble and to persecution: Christ's work has charm enough for His people with all its difficulties, and when *He* calls they are willing. Thus does the Captain of salvation say to any one of them, in providence, Occupy this watchtower under the very eye of the enemy, and look for little aid from thy companions in this warfare. The willing follower takes his place accordingly, and is satisfied to know that amid all his dangers the eye of his great Leader is upon him. Does He say to another, Go forth and contend with these enemies; they will be violent in their opposition; thou wilt have restless days and sleepless nights; nevertheless, resist them? The willing follower goes forth, and trusting to the assistance of his Leader, does his best in the conflict. Does He say to another, Go as ambassador from me to such a place, and tell the people there what terms I offer them: the majority will despise thee, and treat thy message with scorn; yet go and proclaim it, some will listen? The willing follower at once goes forth and speaks accordingly, leaving to his Master the issue of the embassy. Does He say to another, It is for the interest of my service that thou shouldst be for some time poorly fed and meanly clothed, that thou shouldst suffer many troubles in the body, because I have certain purposes to answer by thy unselfish devotedness? The willing follower is content to submit to his Leader's word; and bread and water in Christ's service are better than all worldly comforts out of it. And once more, does He say to any one, Thy time of *active* service is not now; thou must remain for a little on the sick-bed, and be satisfied with what comforts are sent unto thee there; such is my will, inquire no further? The ready follower is contented with his Master's order, and is willing to *suffer* as well as to *act* when Christ so pleases. So wide, then,

brethren, is the interpretation we put upon the words, '*a willing people*.' They designate a people willing for whatever is Christ's will, because they love Him and trust Him. And do not suppose that we have drawn a fancy sketch in thus describing them. If that willingness of which we have been speaking is something beyond your experience, cast not away the description of it as untrue; but ask yourselves whether this may not rather be the truth, that ye are not Christ's, and therefore know not what a willing service means.

II. In the second place, let me advert to the decorations of Christ's people: 'They appear in the beauties of holiness.'

If we have found, in the matter of willingness, a mark by which the true follower of Christ may be distinguished from the pretended follower, this additional matter which we have now to investigate makes the test yet more plain. The vision which the Psalmist had of the Messiah, and which he seems to have kept before him while he wrote this psalm, was that of a leader marshalling his forces for a great enterprise, and assigning to each the place which he was to occupy. The following out of this figure will illustrate the topic at present before us. Let us imagine to ourselves a great army under the conduct of a commander of tried experience, encamped within sight of the enemy with whom they have to contend. Suppose the general order issued, that whenever a certain signal is given, all shall be ready to take the post marked out for them, with certain accoutrements, and in a special dress: with this plain intimation too, that these furnishings are indispensable toward the success of the expedition. Then, if when the trumpet sounds an alarm, and each man seems to hasten to his place, it should be found that this and that one had forgot or despised the order with respect to his equipments, would these who are convicted of such neglect be accounted good and faithful soldiers? Certainly not. They would, with all their apparent readiness, mar the very purpose of the enterprise. The application of these remarks to the subject before us is very obvious. It is not enough, you will perceive, that Christ's followers profess to be *ready* for their work; they must have the equipment which He requires, and

that is holiness, else they are unfit for their place. But you may say, Can any one be *willing* to follow Christ, and yet be destitute of this great qualification by which His followers are distinguished? We answer, that where there is *true* willingness, there is everything else ; but a man may *appear* to be willing to do many things for Christ, and yet may want the qualification by which the genuineness of his professions is to be tested. It is possible to contend for the truth, yea, to suffer for the truth, without crucifying the old man with his lusts, and putting on the new man. It is possible to act the part of an ambassador for Christ, yea, and to do it faithfully and respectably, so far as the announcing of the terms of the embassy are concerned, while at the same time personal holiness is overlooked. And there may be much appearance of contentment and resignation under poverty and on the sick-bed, and much profession of acquiescence in the will of God, without the slightest symptom of spirituality of mind beyond what these appearances indicate. And thus you will perceive that in all these cases we have the soldier, as it were, at his post, but without the great and essential equipment. It is indeed most humbling, brethren, to reflect that men may speak for Christ, and act for Him, and display much zeal and devotedness in His cause, while yet they want the one thing that He especially requires, namely, holiness.

This is the peculiar and indispensable mark of His people, and that which distinguishes them as His. But how shall we describe it? What is holiness? Let us try to ascertain this. And for this purpose let us take the terms, a *virtuous* or *good* man, and a *holy* man, and endeavour to find out what is the difference between them. It will at once occur to you that there *is* a difference: wherein does it consist? A good or virtuous man is one who discharges with fidelity all the duties of that station in which he is placed, who cannot be found fault with either in his conduct toward his family, or in his intercourse with the world at large,—a man who may be pointed to as a pattern of excellence in all the relations which he occupies. But this is not altogether a holy man. We must feel from the very description, and from the ideas which it suggests, that there is something wanting here to constitute holiness.

And what is it ? I would say, in a word, that the holy man, besides having all the distinguishing qualities of the good man, is one who loathes all impurity in thought, or speech, or conduct. There is a sensitiveness about the holy man that makes him turn away from everything that can pollute, in the heart as well as in the life. To illustrate : take the person of very delicate taste, as distinguished from the person of good taste. The latter will see the excellences of any work of art, and duly appreciate them ; but the former, along with this, will detect a very slight error, and feel as if it marred the whole. In other words, the holy man is one who shrinks from sin as well as delights in virtue ; and holiness is shrinking from what is sinful, as well as the practice of what is good and praiseworthy. It forms, as the text tells us, the decoration of Christ's people ; it constitutes their very beauty ; it marks them out as His. When they are said to be clothed with the beauties of holiness, this implies that they are not only characterized by their outward conformity to the law of God, but that they seek to have the whole frame of the heart—every thought, every feeling, every breathing of the soul—regulated by God's holy will. And oh, what struggles they have with heart-corruption ; what mournings for secret sin ; what prayers for deliverance from its power ; what self-condemnation, when to the eye of their fellow-mortals they seem almost to be perfect ! Yet they do advance. Their hatred and loathing of sin become more and more intense, their resistance to it more and more steady, their triumph over it more and more complete ; until at length in spirit, in affection, and in desire, they are made meet for that place into which nothing that defileth can enter. These, then, are the people of Christ. And, brethren, if we saw things in their proper light, if we could judge of the beautiful as those glorious spirits do that have never sinned, we would feel that holiness alone is real and proper beauty. It forms the glory of God's own character—the excellence, if we may so speak, of Jehovah Himself ; and is not the creature made glorious indeed, when, by the grace of the Eternal Spirit, he is invested with heaven's own beauty, and transformed into the image of his Maker ? What miserable phantoms do men pursue on

earth, what trifles do they toil and fight for, as contrasted with this heavenly excellence which adorns and dignifies the followers of the Lamb! Let it be ours, brethren, to pant more ardently after this highest of attainments, that we may be holy as Christ is holy, and perfect as He is perfect.

III. But now, in the third place, I would advert to what is here said respecting the number of Christ's followers. 'They are as the dew-drops from the womb of the morning.' It is well, brethren, that this psalm is prophetic, else we should not know how to interpret this part of it. We glance at the history of the church from the time of Christ downward; and alas! while we see nation after nation outwardly submitting to the gospel, and receiving the name of Christian, we are compelled to feel that the true church in every age has been a little flock, as Christ designated the faithful few that were around Him—a little flock and a troubled flock. The small boat with the twelve tossed at midnight upon the waves of the Sea of Galilee, is the fittest emblem of the church of Christ throughout the whole of her eventful history. A few witnesses for the truth with devoted hearts and willing minds, in the midst of a host of cold formalists and of deadly adversaries,—what a mournful picture, and how unlike that which the Psalmist beheld in vision! But it will not be always so. Heaven and earth may pass away, but God's word will not. Go forth on a morning in spring, when the first sunbeams are rolling away the morning cloud,—see how the light sparkles in the little drop which hangs upon the point of every blade. Count, if you can, those tiny mirrors which reflect in varied colours the cheering ray, and make the green earth for a moment one vast sea of light! While you are lost in wonder at this display of nature's loveliness; while you are admiring the freshness of the scene, and are drinking in health and pure enjoyment from it, the Psalmist takes you by the hand, as it were, and pointing to these shining dew-drops, beautiful and countless, says, Such, for number and for fairness, will Christ's people be when the day of His power cometh. At present you see but as through a glass darkly. Oh, brethren, that will be a glorious time for the church when the prediction

is fulfilled—when she embraces the whole earth within her bosom, and when for one willing and holy servant Christ shall have thousands ! When the Lord gives the word, and great is the company of them that publish it ; and when the Spirit gives to that word, as He did on the day of Pentecost, power to wound, and yet to heal—to kill, and yet to make alive ; that will be the time when the faithful may hold up their heads, for there shall be nothing to hurt or to destroy in all God's holy mountain. Surely this is a time worth waiting for—worth praying for ! But the language of the text is applicable to another time yet more eventful, and for the people of Christ more glorious. This psalm describes Messiah's triumphs over all His enemies. These shall not be completed until the morning of the resurrection. He must reign until He hath put all enemies under His feet ; and the last enemy that shall be subdued is death. Then it will be that this beautiful prophecy shall have its full accomplishment. The barriers of the tomb will then be burst ; the tenants of the dark sepulchre will come forth ; the corrupt shall put on incorruption. John saw the bright assemblage more clearly than the Psalmist, and he thus describes it : ' I beheld, and lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands.' This is the realization of the Psalmist's vision ; these are the willing people in the beauties of holiness, numerous as the dew-drops from the womb of the morning. They *were* a few, and often a persecuted few, on earth ; but now, when gathered together, who can number them ? These are the trophies of Messiah's power ; these the purchase of His blood. My brethren, would *ye* have your place among them ? Then you must take it now. They came out of great tribulation ; they washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Ye must wash too in that fountain ; and, like them, ye must follow Christ, and wear His livery, which is holiness, if ye would be partakers of their blessedness. There is another assemblage, let me beseech you to remember, that will be gathered before Messiah on the morning of the resurrection,—the transgressors of the law of nature,—the trampers on His precious blood,—



the despisers of the Spirit,—the men that said, We will not have this man to reign over us. These will be dragged out of the dark grave, and brought, all unsightly as they are, into the light of judgment. Would ye be partners with them in their lot? If not, then *now* come forth from them, and be separate; take Christ as your leader; go after Him, bearing the cross, crucified to the world, and having the world crucified to you. *That* is the path which leads to glory, honour, and immortality.

IV. But, in the fourth place, we must consider for a moment what is here said of the way and time in which sinners are made Christ's willing followers. It is 'in the day of His power.'

1. As to the *way* of it;—not by the power or eloquence of man, but by the Spirit of the Lord, are the rebels subdued, and the unholy sanctified. The grace of the Spirit is called the rod of Christ's power, because Christ sends the Spirit; and thus, wherever the Spirit works, Christ may be said to work, or His power to be exerted. Now how does He put forth His power? What method does He employ to make His people willing? We would say, in answer to this question, *He administers His government not so much by terror as by love.* There are, indeed, terrible things written in the book of God against the workers of iniquity; things so terrible, that when they are brought home to the conscience by the Spirit, they make the stoutest-hearted man to tremble. Yet, brethren, we do not regard this as what may be called the peculiar display of Christ's power, because it does not of itself subdue the sinner to His authority. The man trembling under the lash of conscience, yea, driven almost to despair, is still as far from being Christ's willing follower as he ever was. It is in the infinitude of His love that Christ's power lies to draw sinners from Satan's kingdom into His own. The Spirit displays to the self-condemned soul the riches of the Saviour's grace; convinces it thus that God in Christ is a being full of tenderness toward His creatures, not willing that any should perish, but that all should turn to Him and live. And when the soul feels *all* this, the work of subjugation is completed, the rebel

is changed into a child. Therefore it is, brethren, that we delight rather to speak of the love of Christ than to urge the terrors of the law. And at this time, in His name, and by His authority, we come to you, asking if ye will have salvation. Look to Him by whom it is dispensed. He wears your nature; He assumed it that He might be qualified to save the lost. His body has evidently been tortured by hostile hands, for it bears the marks of torture. These wounds were endured for sinners. He now reigns, but it is that He may gather together into one, protect and raise to glory, the people given to Him by the Father. Can ye reject this precious Christ? Can ye despise this wondrous love? Nay, brethren, come and let us together hail Jesus as our King and Leader, and offer Him this day the homage of willing hearts; let us join in the adoration of the once faithless but *then* believing disciple who exclaimed, looking to the Saviour's wounds, 'My Lord, and my God.'

2. But again, as to the *time* at which Christ makes His people willing;—it is '*the day* of His power.' People are sometimes found to speculate thus when the gospel is faithfully and forcibly preached: 'Who can withstand these arguments and these appeals? Surely, if sinners are ever to be moved, these truths will move them.' And yet often does it happen that the most powerful arguments and the most urgent appeals fall pointless upon the hearers, just because it is not the day of Christ's power. The sovereignty of the Lord Jesus, indeed, is peculiarly discernible in the whole process of turning sinners to Himself, and in all the circumstances therewith connected. When Peter preached after the effusion of the Spirit, *that* was a day of power; three thousand were converted. Paul preached at Athens, more eloquently, a critic would say, and yet very few were savingly affected by his preaching; that was not a day of power. And when we look at the progress of the truth at the present time, we find no little difficulty in accounting for the effects which are produced in one case, and not in another. Christ, indeed, has always the same power; but there are *special* seasons for the *special* exercise of it. I cannot, however, in the meantime enter upon the consideration of this subject, although it

might be interesting to trace the connection between the faithful prayers and watchings of His people on the one hand, and the exhibition of *His* power to save upon the other. All that we know with certainty is, that when the day of His power comes, the mountains of difficulty melt like wax at the presence of the Lord. In the case of individuals, the day of power comes under every possible diversity of circumstance. Sometimes it comes to those who are just entering upon busy life; and then a man will perhaps be drawn from the course of pursuit which his friends have marked out for him, and will devote himself to the preaching of the gospel, instead of taking the way to wealth and to eminence. The day of power sometimes overtakes those who have been trained to act a part in the busy haunts of pleasure and of vanity, and then farewell to all the fond anticipations of worldly friends: the soul they would have imprisoned, finds its liberty and its enjoyment in Christ. The day of power is sometimes at the close of life, when a thousand prayers that formerly seemed lost, find their answer as it were in a moment, and the sinner at the eleventh hour is plucked as a brand from the burning. The day of power is sometimes, as it is called in the Scripture, the dark and cloudy day, when Christ makes His grace known and proved in the midst of much tribulation and distress, and is embraced as a covert from the storm and a hiding-place from the tempest. But I would say here, that Christ's day of power is not yet come in the sense in which the Psalmist speaks of it. There was something *like* it on the day of Pentecost, and something like it at the era of the Reformation, when converts might be numbered by thousands. There have been here and there throughout the world, even in our own times, some faint glimmerings of light, as if the morning of that day were to dawn. But it has not come yet; and it will not fully come, except in connection with the gathering in and the restoring of Israel. Christ has shown us what He can do by the most unlikely means, in the Pentecostal work, and at the Reformation also. He revives His people's hearts by the evidences of His converting power from time to time in the case of individuals. But all these things are as the few ripe ears of corn where all else is green,

compared with the work which shall be wrought hereafter, when nations shall be born in a day, and all shall be blessed in Christ, and shall call Him blessed.

V. In conclusion, I would request you to observe how all these things redound to the glory of Christ.

I can only advert in one or two sentences to this topic. Is it the glory of a monarch to reign over subjects that delight in his authority, and will do anything to please him? Christ has that glory. His people are *willing*. Is it the glory of a monarch to behold his subjects made happy by him? Christ has that glory. Is it the glory of a monarch to have his name in the mouths and in the hearts of his subjects? That glory is Christ's also. The willing people, the people in the beauties of holiness, the people numerous as the dew-drops, are of Christ's own making. He has all the glory of them. Let us, brethren, give Him the glory. 'Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests to God and His Father, to Him be the glory for ever and ever.' Can you say Amen to that? Ah, brethren, if we are not willing to glorify Christ now, where is our hope for eternity? The members of the church above all glorify Him: this day will ye join with them? We must stir ourselves up to higher efforts in Christ's service. Amen.

## VII.

### THE BELIEVER'S DIFFICULTIES.

‘They which builded on the wall, and they that bare burdens, with those that laded, every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon.’—NEH. IV. 17.

IT had been prophesied by Daniel that the walls of Jerusalem should be rebuilt in troublous times, after the return of the people from their captivity: and the history of the period verifies the word of the prophet. The jealousy of the Samaritans was from the first excited against those of the Jews who returned from Babylon; and certain circumstances contributed to convert this jealousy into actual opposition. The son of the high priest had married the daughter of the governor of Samaria. And as some of the regulations which were framed by Nehemiah for the government of the infant city were disagreeable to this person and many other Jews, he fled over with his party to the Samaritans, and became from that time the irreconcilable enemy of his brethren in Judea. Many were the attempts, both by artifice and by open violence, which he made to assassinate Nehemiah, as well as to obstruct the work which lay so near the heart of that good man. And so determined and incessant were his efforts to prevent the restoration of Jerusalem, that Nehemiah and his friends required to be on the watch night and day against their spiteful and insidious enemy. The words of the text furnish the strongest evidence that could be given of the dangers amid which the holy city was raised from its ruins, when for safety it was necessary that ‘they who builded on the wall, and they that bare burdens, with those that laded, should every one with one of his hands work in the work,

and with the other hand hold a weapon.' It will at once suggest itself to you, my brethren, that these words may be very aptly applied to illustrate some of the peculiarities of the Christian life; and it is for this end that we would endeavour to apply them, as bearing on the solemn work in which last Lord's day we were engaged. The first temple, built in the peaceful and prosperous days of Solomon, and irradiated by the divine glory at its consecration, is an appropriate emblem of man's condition when he proceeded from His Maker's hands, perfect, and adorned with His Maker's image. But sin entered, and this noble fabric was laid in ruins! The erection of the second temple, in the troublous times of Nehemiah, amid the perpetual opposition of the Samaritans, is no less appropriate an emblem of man's condition when he becomes the subject of God's saving grace. The Scripture, indeed, in various places, forces these similitudes upon our notice, when it represents believers as the temples of the Holy Ghost; and more particularly, when it describes Jesus Christ as the true foundation,—the corner-stone laid in Zion, elect and precious; and His people as so many *lively stones* built upon that sure foundation, and cemented thereto by faith, and to each other by the bond of love. There is, we may say, a vast spiritual structure in progress, in the erecting of which the Holy Ghost is the great agent; and of this structure, which is the church of the living God, believers are sometimes figuratively spoken of as constituting the materials, which the Spirit moulds according to His own fashion; and sometimes as the workmen whom He employs for the accomplishment of His purpose. It is in this latter character that we have to regard them in following out the train of remark suggested by the text. Every true follower of Christ is the workman of the Divine Spirit, not only inasmuch as it is the Spirit who calls him from the service of sin and Satan to the service of God, and qualifies him for that service; but also inasmuch as, from the moment of conversion, it becomes his great object to work the Spirit's work. Now from the text I would take occasion to speak of some of the difficulties which the believer, in the prosecution of his work, has to encounter, and of the attitude which he must continually present. Each

of these topics would admit of much illustration, and therefore we can but imperfectly glance at them in the meantime.

I. In the first place, there are pressing difficulties in the believer's way while he is engaged in the prosecution of his work.

The Christian life is a scene of perpetual conflict. This is a subject to which we have very frequently to allude, and which may therefore fall upon the minds of many with no more force than the most commonplace remark. And yet it is to be feared that there are many who, with the name of Christians, know nothing more of the difficulties by which the Christian is beset, than what they have learnt, we might almost say, by rote. The truth is, that it is not until a man has entered with seriousness and with some devotedness upon the service of Christ, that he becomes aware how numerous and how formidable the adversaries are that stand between him and the point which he strives to reach. While there is nothing but mere profession, it is as if one were gliding along a smooth current, where all exertion is unnecessary; but when the power of heart religion is felt, and Christ's glory is truly and resolutely aimed at, then it is as if the little skiff had to be impelled against both wind and current. No doubt there are crosses and trials in every situation of life, which disturb a man's quiet, and occasion him much perplexity and uneasiness; and just for this reason, when the difficulties of the Christian life are spoken of in a general way, most people suppose that they understand what is meant by them. And no doubt, also, these crosses are sometimes to be reckoned among the peculiar troubles which afflict the just, and from which it is promised that the Lord will deliver them; but they are not in themselves *religious difficulties* properly so called. On the contrary, they are made to work together for good to them that love God; and the concurring testimony of God's children is, that their best interests have been promoted by means of them. Those difficulties of which we have to speak at present are altogether of a different character; being such hindrances to the believer's advancement in holiness, and to his perseverance in well-doing, as arise from the temptations

of the world, from the subtlety of Satan, and from the state of his own heart. These the mere nominal Christian thinks little of, for this obvious reason, that he is carried along by their influence, without any attempt to resist it; and his principal struggle is not to overcome his spiritual adversaries, but to drown the voice within him, which testifies that he is allowing himself to be dragged along by them into perdition. But look, on the other hand, at the confessions and complaints of the people of God, whether as recorded in the Scripture or as noted in the diaries of private Christians, and you will perceive that all of them felt themselves in the midst of a perpetual warfare with these enemies that have been named,—a warfare, alas! in which they were often cast down, although never destroyed. And so likewise, brethren, if ye have indeed entered upon the narrow path, ye will record your testimony also to the truth that every inch of ground in the Christian life must be contested; that there are fiery darts which have to be quenched; and that the apostle speaks no less experimentally than truly, when he describes the course of the believer as a fighting of the good fight of faith. It is not my design, however, in the meantime, to advert minutely to the manner in which the Christian is assailed by *all* his spiritual adversaries; I would only offer a few remarks upon the conflict which he has to wage with the corruption of his own heart. It is *here* that he is beset most sorely with opposition, so that the words of Christ used with reference to another subject are strictly applicable in this case: ‘A man’s foes are those of his own household.’ Satan does indeed watch for opportunities to inject the poison of his counsels, and to rivet the chains which he has already wound about the soul; but it is because the heart is corrupt, and is not guarded, that he is able to do either. The citadel has a thousand weak points about it; but if it were not for internal rebellion, the enemy would be successfully repulsed. Who that has had any experience in the great work of subjugating his affections and desires to the will of Christ, and that is really in earnest about the salvation of his soul and the service of Christ, will not acknowledge that often, when he would have been most anxious to command profitable thoughts and a spiritual frame of mind,



he has been hurried hither and thither after vanity, and into what is sinful and impure, like the light down, the sport of every breeze? Who that possesses the experience we have referred to will not confess that again and again, when he thought he could have depended upon himself, and could have defied the power of any temptation, some little incident has awakened the dormant tendencies of the corrupt nature, and has taught him bitterly to feel that, when he imagined himself above the reach of all such influences, he was still deeply tainted with earth's pollutions? Truly the heart even of the holiest in this world may be well compared to the little pool, which, when it is unruffled, seems all brightness and purity, but when slightly stirred, shows that there is sad defilement beneath. Is it not most humiliating and most painful, that we cannot engage in prayer or read the Bible without being distracted and troubled with thoughts which savour more of the regions of darkness, than of the abode of all purity, where the heart should then be? Is it not fearful to think that the world should come in, and that the wicked one should find entrance and materials to work upon, where Christ, the King of glory, should reign supreme? Yet so it is, in consequence of that depraved nature which we all inherit, and which is not finally laid off until death comes, and the grave. It is impossible to single out all the varied ways in which this corruption displays itself. Volumes would not be sufficient for *that*. It gives the world a hold of us which it should not have. It poisons ordinances, or strips them of their value. It makes us forget God, and yet think that all is right, because we are engaged in necessary duties. It robs prayer of its very soul, because, if we regard iniquity in our hearts, the Lord will not hear us. And while there may not be much that can be blamed in our outward deportment, it makes the little world within a charnel-house instead of a sanctuary,—an image of the place of misery,—when it should be rather like the place of all holiness and blessedness. Heart corruption, then, is the greatest foe of the Christian. From that he cannot flee. It is a coiled snake, whose den is in his very breast. And had he nothing else than this corruption to fear while he strives to rear up the spiritual edifice, *i.e.* to advance in grace

and in godliness, he would yet require to be furnished, as the people were under Nehemiah, with the weapon to defend as well as with the implement to build. But now, brethren, let me here remark, that it is very possible there may be some here present who feel and willingly acknowledge that such statements as those we have given convey an accurate enough description of their own state, while at the same time they may be people who have never earnestly desired to be delivered from this state. A man can look self-convicted, and say, This is the exact picture of my feelings and experience, while he has never made an effort to have *different* feelings and experience. The mere formalist will confess, when he is in a confessing mood, that he has thought of many things which should have been absent from his mind in prayer; and in like manner he will speak of other spiritual exercises. And just because there is such similarity between what *he* feels, and what is described as the state of feeling on too many occasions among the true followers of Christ, he may think himself one of them; in the same way as some people of weak mind have supposed themselves endued with great genius, because they have borne an external resemblance to some man of genius, or are noted for some mental eccentricity which was *his* peculiar failing. *Let it therefore be well understood*, that the corruption of heart of which we have been speaking is not a thing from which any man may take comfort with respect to his state, but a thing to be detested in all its shades as it is manifested in ourselves; not a thing to be looked upon with a passing sigh or groan, but a thing to be contended with, conquered, destroyed. It is our sleepless enemy, Satan's material, in which he works,—the world's avenue, by which it gains access to our hearts; and it must be opposed with the weapon for war as well as the weapon for building.

II. I now remark, in the second place, that when we consider the very dangerous position which the Christian thus occupies, with a crafty adversary on the one side, viz. Satan, an alluring and sometimes a threatening foe on the other side, viz. the world, and a treacherous heart within, his proper attitude is that which was assumed by the people spoken of in

the text, every one of whom, while with one of his hands he wrought in the work, with the other hand held a weapon.

Now, when we contemplate these builders of the wall of Jerusalem maintaining this attitude, and endeavour to analyze the spirit or frame of mind which their doing so indicates, we obtain a useful and practical answer to the important question, How ought the follower of Christ to act in his position, as surrounded by so many spiritual enemies, by whose aggressions he is perpetually in danger of being ruined?

1. And here then, first, I observe that the Jews, with a weapon in the one hand while they builded with the other, were in the exercise of constant *watchfulness*. They knew that there was evil meditated against them, but they knew not the moment when the onset might be; and therefore, like wise men, they stood prepared for it. Their conduct in this temporal matter exactly resembled that which our Lord enjoins upon all with reference to things spiritual, when He says: 'Let your loins be girded about, and your lamps burning; and be ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord.' Christian watchfulness is one of the most indispensable, and at the same time one of the most comprehensive, duties to which the disciples of Jesus are called. The necessity of it He has Himself taught us, when He prescribes it along with prayer as the grand antidote to the power of temptation; and its comprehensiveness may easily be shown, from a consideration of what the Lord requires of all who believe in His name. They have, in general terms, to cleanse themselves from all filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God; and they have to abound in well-doing, that they may adorn the doctrine of the Saviour. This, then, being the case, who is the watchful man? Evidently the person who is ever on the alert to accomplish both these ends, who makes it his great study to advance in personal holiness, and at the same time to be active in doing good to others. And what a field is opened up here for the employment of Christian energy! Look at it for a moment. If we are watchful, brethren, we shall mark all the occasions by which we have been betrayed into coldness and deadness of spirit in time past, and shall endeavour for the future to avoid them.

If we are watchful, we shall judge from what we have learnt of ourselves, and of the weak points of our character, to keep at a distance from everything that would draw us into forgetfulness of God, into the breach of solemn engagements, and into actions inconsistent with our profession; so that we shall not make shipwreck of our comfort and of our peace where we have lost them before. If we are watchful, we shall observe what trains of thought have drawn us into unsuitable frames of mind, and what circumstances have led to these trains of thought; and we shall shun all such circumstances, and resist with God's help the first kindling up of such trains of thought. If we are watchful, we shall notice what courses of reading, what books, have tended most to secularize or to corrupt our minds, and shall shun all similar risks for the time to come. If we are watchful, we shall take good heed what counsels and what companionships have formerly led us astray, and shall, whatever the effort may cost us, give them up for the future. If we are watchful, we shall keep before us the good resolutions and purposes we have formed, and make it our earnest endeavour to see that nothing is allowed to interfere with the fulfilment of them. If we are watchful, we shall be most scrupulous in avoiding everything which may be in any way the most distant connected with the indulgence of our besetting sin and infirmity, lest we be found pleasing ourselves, and giving occasion to the adversary to obtain advantage over us. In a word, if we are watchful, we shall be jealous over ourselves with godly jealousy, lest by speech or thought or look we should be drawn out of the path of devotedness to Christ into the mazes of folly and error and sin. All these things come under the head of watchfulness, in so far as a man's personal holiness is concerned. And then, in the other matter of well-doing to others, if we are watchful, we shall observe wherein we have come short in time past, so that we may abound more and more in time to come; and shall make it matter of duty to discover means and opportunities of being useful to our fellow-creatures, even though *that* should subject us to somewhat of personal trouble and inconvenience. Such is a sketch, but a sketch only, of Christian watchfulness; and if any one should ask for a short

practical rule as to the best mode of following it out, we would answer that the daily and searching exercise of self-examination, under a deep sense of our responsibility to Christ, who gave Himself for us, and is to be our judge, will be one of the most likely means to make our watchfulness both strict and profitable. And now, before leaving this department of the subject, there is one point to which I would for a moment advert, as suggested by the text, which has an important bearing upon the whole question. It will occur to most of you, that when the people under Nehemiah were equipped, as they are here represented to have been, with a weapon of war, and when they could only use one hand in the work of building, their progress must have been very slow; and some may suppose that it would have been better for them to build at all hazards than thus impede their progress. But when we remember the circumstances in which they were placed, we shall perceive that their course was the wise one; and in the analogy between their case and that of Christ's followers, we shall find a most useful lesson suggested with respect to the subject of Christian watchfulness. It is very true, that if every workman on the wall of Jerusalem had been at liberty to employ all his efforts in the one labour of building, he might have pointed to a greater amount of work done any day, from morning to evening, than in his posture of self-defence he could possibly do. But then, had the means of self-defence been lost sight of entirely, one inroad of the enemy might have destroyed *him* and his work together. And so, if there were no enemies in the Christian's way, he might put forth his energies more resolutely and undividedly in the work of doing good to others. If he did not require to spend so much of his time in secret exercises,—in keeping the avenues to his own heart, and maintaining personal intercourse with God,—he might perhaps point to much more visible good as the fruit of his labour, than, as matters stand with him, he can do. But he is surrounded by enemies, and hence the necessity of his keeping watch to prevent their inroads: hence the necessity of his spending a certain portion of time in ascertaining how it fares with his own soul. He who does nothing else than attend to his own interests, and watch over

the frames and feelings of his own mind, is certainly an unprofitable servant; but it is also true, that he who gives all his time and labour to the furtherance of religion *without*, and overlooks the state of his own heart and the duties of the closet, is also unfaithful to his Master. The religion of the one has too much selfishness in it, and that of the other too little personal communing with God, to be the religion of Christ. Combine the two, and you have what is requisite, and what is signified in the text by the weapon in the one hand, and the implement for building in the other.

2. In the second place, I observe that the attitude of the Jews, as described in the words before us, shows not only that they were watchful against their treacherous enemies, but that they were careful to furnish themselves with the means of *defence*.

There is indeed a very close connection between this point and that which we have just considered; but still there is an obvious difference. When a man grasps a weapon of defence, and will not part with it, this shows that he is conscious of danger, and is on the watch against it; but it shows, moreover, that he is prepared to defend himself. And so, if we have spoken before of watchfulness as needful for the Christian in his present position of difficulty, we have now to speak of *the armour* with which he is furnished successfully to maintain it. But here, as in the former case, we cannot enter into all the particulars which it might be desirable to enumerate; we must therefore be satisfied with an abridgment. There were two pieces of armour, then, which of old time were regarded as peculiarly indispensable for the equipment of the soldier, viz. the shield and the sword,—the one to parry a blow, and the other to strike; and these among other things are mentioned in the Scripture as forming part of the armour of the Christian soldier. He *has the shield of faith*, and *the sword of the Spirit*, which is the word of God. See how they assist him. The feeling of his own worthlessness and guilt, excited by some outbreaking of that corruption of nature of which we have already spoken, becomes sometimes so strong that he would sink under it, and be reduced to utter despair, were it not that faith catches hold of a Saviour's love and a Saviour's

righteousness, as that in which the soul is to find its strength; and thus faith is, as it were, a shield between the soul and that which would destroy it, viz. despair. Judas had not this shield; therefore he was destroyed. Peter with all his weakness had it; and though the blow brought him down, yet through faith he recovered himself.

Again, the follower of Christ is sometimes exposed to fiery trial in maintaining his integrity; everything seems to be against him, and the insidious suggestion is whispered in his ear that God makes but poor provision for His servants, and that if they are wise they will abandon the cause of such a master. Here too he would be overcome did not faith come in between him and these suggestions, and with the display of the realities which at present are unseen, strengthen his fainting soul. Demas had not this shield of faith; and therefore he forsook Christ, having loved this present world. Paul had it; and therefore he was satisfied with God's dealings, yea, counted all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus his Lord.

Again, as to the other part of the armour, the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. How marvellously does it open a path for believers through all their difficulties! It is the weapon with which Christ Himself conquered the great adversary. He cut through all the tempter's subtle arguments with the word of God. And if it was *His* weapon, what better one would His people choose? A text of Scripture suitably applied and acted on is the surest means of putting our spiritual enemies to flight. Yea, if we would conquer that corruption of heart which, as we have said, is the most dangerous of them all, the word of God is the weapon. For what says Christ Himself? 'Sanctify them through Thy truth; Thy word is truth.' Who, then, to bring the matter to a short issue, who then is best furnished with the armour needful for the spiritual conflict? The man, we say, who believes in Christ, and in His word; for the belief of the word of God is the shield of faith and the sword of the Spirit put together. This is your defence, brethren. With this you may cope with any adversary. Schools of learning may teach men to utter noble sentiments; faith in God's word enables them

*to do great things.* It carried a whole host through the Red Sea. It made a stone thrown from a sling more effective than the spear of the choicest warrior. It will nerve you for every trial, and make you victorious over every enemy. But how are we to get this shield of faith and sword of the Spirit? They are furnished by the Holy Spirit Himself, in answer to fervent supplication. And what is more, they can only be used successfully when *accompanied with fervent supplication.* Hence the apostle, when enumerating the various pieces of armour which the Christian has to use in His warfare, concludes with the admonition to pray always. Satan is strong, but the word of God is stronger. The world is powerful, but faith is more powerful still; 'for this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.' Heart corruption lies deep; but prayer can reach it, faith can master it, the word applied by the Spirit can slay it.

3. But for a moment longer, I would observe, in the third place, that the attitude of the Jews, as described in the text, indicates *the firmest determination* to make progress in their work.

If ever people were tempted to stop short and give over an undertaking as desperate, *they* might have been excused for so doing. But no; though they should add but one stone each to the building, and *that* at the risk of their lives, they will do it. A good lesson for us, my brethren. Advancement is the watchword of the Christian. Let each one act upon it. The gospel of Christ, in the case of a believer surveying the vast field of duty that is spread out before him, knows no such plea as this—I can do nothing. When men come indeed with the question, What shall we do to inherit eternal life? the Bible answers, You can do nothing. Christ has done all to gain for you the title to life; and if ye receive Him, life is yours. But when those who have received Him say in their indolence, We can do nothing, the Scripture says, 'You can do all things, through Christ strengthening you.' Some have a wider sphere of labour opened up to them externally than that which falls to the lot of others. But in the subjugation of the heart to Christ the labour of all is very much the same. Let us therefore prosecute that labour with all our energies;



and before another communion season arrive, if we are spared to see it, let us be able to say with thanksgiving, that through the good hand of God upon us we have conquered this and that sin, and have made some advancement in the cultivation of those graces in which heretofore we have been most deficient.

Now, in conclusion. My brethren, we are all engaged in a great work. These bodies of ours must be the temples of God, if we shall ever see Him in glory. You are rearing a fabric not for time, but for eternity, if you are striving to purify yourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit. The object is too grand not to be opposed. While you build, therefore, you must fight. But God gives you the weapons for the combat—the word, prayer, faith; and He Himself fights along with you. There may be fear and sorrow while the work advances; there may be mountains of difficulty in the way; but hear the word of the Lord by Zechariah: ‘Who art thou, O great mountain? thou shalt become a plain; and the headstone of the building shall be brought forth with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it!’ Oh, let us carry on the great structure, brethren; let us have our bodies the temples of the Holy Ghost. And then, though death will lay his rude hand upon the temple, and make it moulder into dust, Christ Himself will raise it up again in the resurrection morning, and make the glory of that second temple far transcend the highest glory of the first. For at the best there are the seeds of corruption here, and hence it is called a vile body; but that which Christ will bring out of the grave will be free from all corruption, and fashioned like unto His own glorious body. Amen.

## VIII.

### THE DEATH OF ABRAHAM.<sup>1</sup>

‘And these are the days of the years of Abraham’s life which he lived, an hundred threescore and fifteen years. Then Abraham gave up the ghost, and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years; and was gathered to his people. And his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite, which is before Mamre; the field which Abraham purchased of the sons of Heth: there was Abraham buried, and Sarah his wife. And it came to pass, after the death of Abraham, that God blessed his son Isaac: and Isaac dwelt by the well Lahai-roi.’—GEN. XXV. 7-11.

WE have now arrived at the closing scene of the life of Abraham, in which, as throughout the whole of his history, he experienced the faithfulness of the divine promises. The Lord had said to him (ch. xv. 15), ‘Thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age;’ and so we read in the text, ‘Abraham gave up the ghost, and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years; and was gathered unto his people.’ It has been remarked that the expression ‘a good old age’ is only used with reference to three individuals in the Scripture, viz. Abraham, Gideon, and David; and is therefore to be regarded not merely as descriptive of the very advanced period to which their life was protracted, but also of the general excellency and worth of their character. It forms, as it were, the epitaph inscribed by the Spirit upon their tombstones, that they died ‘in a *good* old age.’ Some commentators have remarked on the expression, ‘Abraham gave up the ghost,’ that it denotes the quietude and cheerful serenity with which he departed from his mortal pilgrimage into the rest that remaineth for the people of God. But there does not seem to be any sufficient

<sup>1</sup> This is the thirtieth of the first series of Lectures on the Old Testament, 12th Feb. 1843.

reason for such an interpretation of the words. The same expression is used indiscriminately with reference both to the bad and to the good; and it forms no evidence of a man's being in the enjoyment of the divine favour, that he breathes his last in perfect freedom from all pain and suffering. The only advantage—and it is an unspeakable one—which the godly man enjoys over the wicked in death, is the good hope, yea, in many cases the comfortable assurance, by which the soul is sustained during the last struggle. This hope, we doubt not, supported and cheered Abraham amid all the infirmities of age, and when he lay upon his death-bed; but it is not necessarily implied by the expression, 'he gave up the ghost.' It has been well observed, however, that by the expression, he died 'an old man, and *full* of years,' is to be understood the satisfaction which the patriarch felt in exchanging this mortal life for another and a better. There are many aged people who, toward the close of their earthly career, even when the infirmities of age thicken upon them, so as one might think to render life a burden, do nevertheless manifest as strong an eagerness to live as the youngest could. Having given all their days to the world, and made no preparation for the coming eternity, they tremble at the prospect of being called away, and thus drag on a wretched existence between the frailties of the present time and the dark anticipations of the future. It was not so with Abraham. He was '*full* of years,' that is, he had no wish to live longer; he rather looked forward with satisfaction and with longing to the period which would set him free from the earthly tabernacle, and introduce him into the building of God, the house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. This was a becoming and a consistent termination of the life of faith. The righteous hath hope in his death. On the expression, 'he was gathered to his people,' Calvin remarks that these words contain an intimation of the immortality of the soul, although at the same time they are not to be *restricted* exclusively, as some would have them to be, to the condition of *believers* in the life to come. 'They imply,' he says, 'that there is a society of men in death as well as in life. And Abraham could not have been said to be gathered to his people when he died, if death were

the dissolution of the soul as well as of the body.' These remarks must be acknowledged to be founded in truth; and they suggest an important practical observation which I would desire for a moment to submit to your notice. 'The expression, "he was gathered to his people,"' says the illustrious Reformer, 'is not to be exclusively restricted to the condition of *believers* after death.' And this statement needs no lengthened proof. For we read equally of David, and of Jeroboam, who caused Israel to sin, that they were 'gathered to their fathers,'—a phrase of the same import as the one in the text, 'gathered to his people.' Now who were Abraham's people? Not his kindred according to the flesh, for from them he was commanded to separate himself; but all those who had lived and died like himself in the faith,—who, while they were on earth, had trodden the same path of devotedness to God,—whose tastes, and feelings, and aspirations had been similar to his own. These were the people to whom he was gathered—the redeemed family of God. And so also, when the wicked die, they are gathered to their people or to their fathers—to those who were of kindred tastes and pursuits with them on earth, and whose society, therefore, will be suitable to their feelings. These are very solemn considerations, my brethren, and well worthy of our serious attention. Let us pursue for a little the train of thought which they open up. With what sort of people do we delight to have fellowship in this world? whom do we choose as our associates? and in what company and exercises do we reap the greatest satisfaction? From the answer which we have to give to these inquiries may be drawn a sufficient indication of what will be our destiny beyond the grave. Each one will be gathered to his people—to those who are of like feeling, and habit, and pursuit with himself. The spiritually-minded will be together, and the carnally-minded will be together; the former enjoying all the blessings of eternal life, the latter suffering all the miseries of eternal death. If, then, we would have our portion among those who are to be for ever with the Lord, we must forsake the world's sins and follies now, and enter upon the narrow path which leadeth unto life. To this there are many earnest calls and

invitations given in the Scripture. You have one of these in the beautiful and figurative language of the forty-fifth Psalm, where the church is addressed in these words: 'Hearken, O daughter, and consider, and incline thine ear; forget also thine own people, and thy father's house; so shall the King greatly desire thy beauty: for He is thy Lord, and worship thou Him.' In plainer language the apostle says: 'Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness: come forth, and be separate, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a father unto you; and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.' To those who obey these pressing calls there are the highest encouragements held forth. All the promises are theirs, and all the privileges which flow from relationship to God as His children. Even while they live on earth, their conversation, or as it means, their citizenship, is in heaven; their home is there; their kindred are there. And when death comes to them, it is not so much, in strict speech, to tear them away from their friends, as to gather them to their people. For the true union of the children of God is above, where the faithful in all past ages are congregated with Christ, the elder Brother of the blessed family; and where we too shall have a place, if on earth we live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved His people, and gave Himself for them. But be it remembered, 'into heaven there shall enter nothing that defileth.' The next point in the narrative is the interment of Abraham: 'His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, which he had purchased from Ephron the Hittite,' and where, thirty-five years before, he had buried Sarah. This is the only passage from which it can be learnt that there was any communication kept up between the son of the bondwoman and the son of the free. But that there had been such correspondence maintained during the lifetime of Abraham between these two branches of his family, as was required for the performance of the ordinary duties and friendships of life, is manifest from the circumstance that Ishmael, who lived at a distance from Isaac, was informed of his father's death, and was present at his funeral. The two brothers had very few feelings in common, and their pursuits were as different as possible. But

as one commentator upon this passage remarks, 'death brings those together who know not how to associate on any other occasion, and will bring us all together sooner or later.' The only other subject which we have to comment upon, is that contained in the eleventh verse: 'And it came to pass, after the death of Abraham, that God blessed his son Isaac; and Isaac dwelt by the well Lahai-roi.' Everything declines and dies but the promise of God. Isaac now, as the head of the family in which the promises were to be realized, becomes the special object of the divine blessing, and occupies, accordingly, for a short space, the most prominent place in the sacred volume. There is not much said in the Scripture with reference to his own personal history; very few particulars of it are recorded. His life was, as compared with that of his father and of his son Jacob, a quiet and peaceful one; and hence the brief compass within which it is confined in the sacred history. But if we had no other notice of him than that which is given in the short verse before us, we would have enough to satisfy us that he was no ordinary man. 'God blessed him,' it is said; and what more could he have desired himself than the blessing of Jehovah? what more could we desire in his behalf to recommend his history to our notice? The most comprehensive prayer that we can offer up for any one in whom we feel an interest is, that God may bless him; and he who enjoys the blessing of God, be he rich or poor, has an inheritance far more valuable than all earthly good. Although the whole story of his life should be compressed within the one short sentence, 'God blessed him,' these few words would raise him to a position higher than the highest that this world can give, apart from the blessing of God. What you have to observe here practically is, that the faith and devotedness of Abraham outlive him, as it were, and that his son reaps the fruits of them. It is true, indeed, that no man inherits grace by natural descent. But it is also true that the loving-kindness of the Lord is from generation to generation of them that fear Him. The man who is himself in the covenant, can plead for his offspring on grounds which will not be disregarded. And such an one needs have no fear, no depressing fears, about those he leaves behind him,

when he himself is called away. 'It came to pass, after the death of Abraham, that God blessed his son Isaac.' The Psalmist gives us a general commentary upon this passage when he says (Ps. xxxvii. 25): 'I have been young, and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread. He is ever merciful, and lendeth, and his seed is blessed.'

Now, having made these few remarks upon the several clauses of the narrative before us, I would desire in the remainder of this discourse to glance at some of the leading incidents in the life of Abraham. In doing this, we have nothing to lay before you which you are not acquainted with. But standing as we are beside the grave of the venerable patriarch, we may suitably interchange a few words bearing upon what he was, and what the grace of God did for him. 'He died in a *good* old age;' and it will be profitable for us to consider how he was conducted to this termination of his pilgrimage. The form, then, into which I would put the observations now to be made is this plain and practical one,—that in the case of Abraham, whose death and interment are treated of in the text, we have an example of what one of the most eminent of God's children was, and how he was dealt with throughout a long and eventful life, and that all the children of God *now* may learn useful lessons from *his* history. If you might suppose such a thing as the people who accompanied the remains of the patriarch to the cave of Machpelah conversing together respecting the leading incidents of his life,—how he walked with God, and how God dealt with him,—you have just such subjects of meditation as we are now briefly to lay before you.

I. First, this remarkable man owed everything he possessed, and everything he was, to the grace of God.

He was born in a region of idolatry, and if he had been left to himself he would have died the victim of idolatry; but the call of God came to him, Leave now thy kindred and thy father's house, and go into a land which I will tell thee of. The call, you will perceive, was very peremptory, and the promise very limited: he had to leave *certain* enjoyments for

*uncertain* blessings, or at least for *undefined* blessings; but he went out in obedience to the commandment, not knowing whither he went. There is nothing said in the sacred history which would lead us to infer that Abraham was in any respect better than his brethren, and that for his apparent devotedness to God he was singled out from among the rest to occupy the high station which was afterwards conferred upon him. On the contrary, it is only after he was thus called to come forth and be separate that the history of his devotedness commences. It was sovereign grace that made the distinction between Abraham and his brethren; and it was because he was the subject of this grace that he forsook the worship of idols, and turned with all his heart to the living God. Here, then, we have the first and the great point of identity between the father of believers and all his children. There are many respects in which the people of God differ from each other in this world—many things which divide them into separate sections, and cause them to present the appearance of so many hostile and contending parties, rather than of one body fighting against a common host of adversaries; but in this respect at least they all agree, that they refer all the advantages they possess above others to the sovereign and distinguishing grace of God. ‘Not unto us,’ they say, ‘not unto us, but unto Thy name be the praise.’

II. In the second place, when the divine call came to Abraham, he manifested a very strong anxiety to make his kindred partakers of the blessings which he himself was invited to partake of.

We have not, indeed, in so many words an account of his efforts to spread the truth among the members of his family narrated; but we have what is still more satisfactory, proofs of his anxiety to bring those he loved along with him out of the land of idolatry into the land in which he was directed to sojourn. The first notice we have of the family is in the eleventh chapter of Genesis, where Terah, the father of Abraham, is described as taking his children with him from Ur of the Chaldees to go into the land of Canaan. But from what is said in the beginning of the twelfth chapter, it seems very probable



that the divine injunction with regard to removal from Ur of the Chaldees to Canaan had been communicated first to Abraham. For it is said, after the death of his father, 'Now the Lord *had* said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred.' And comparing all the parts of the narrative together, we would suppose that when Abraham was divinely called he made known the event to the other members of the family; and that while Nahor his brother, the progenitor of Rebecca, and Rachel, and Leah, refused to quit his present possessions to go into this land of promise, Terah his father, along with Lot his nephew, joined Abraham in this journey of faith,—Terah being the conductor of it while he lived, because he was the head of the family.

But however this may be, at all events we know that Abraham carried Lot along with him in his sojournings, until the latter, for the love of worldly gain, separated himself; and that after the separation, the welfare of his relative lay near the patriarch's heart, as is manifest in his pleading for guilty Sodom because Lot was there. In all this, then, we have another illustration of the identity that subsists between the father of believers and his children. Who ever yet partook of the grace of God, and obeyed the invitations of the gospel, without desiring to carry along with him to the promised rest those who were dear to him? Whenever a man feels the preciousness of his own soul,—perceives the danger to which he is exposed by living at a distance from God,—beholds the suitableness of the refuge provided in the gospel, and flees thereinto as into a covert from the wrath to come,—he begins to take an interest in the salvation of others. No believer was ever yet contented to be saved alone, to travel toward heaven in solitary pilgrimage. The desire of converting others is always an accompaniment or fruit of grace in the heart. Christ's words form the directory of His people, as the principle they embody did of Abraham: 'The candle is not lighted to be put under a bushel, but to give light to all around. The things that are spoken to you in the ear proclaim upon the house-top.'

III. In the third place, much happened to Abraham in the

course of his sojourning calculated to render the divine promises very doubtful to him.

He was brought out of Ur of the Chaldees into the land of Canaan, under the impression that he was to exchange a worse condition for a better. There would have been no promise in the case at all had it not been so. But how stood the fact? He had not been long in this land of which so much had been said to him, until he was compelled by famine to quit it, and go down for a season into Egypt. And on many other occasions he was subjected to severe trial,—trial which it is obvious would not have been sent upon him had not Jehovah designed to exhibit in him a notable specimen of the efficacy of His grace. But although Canaan seemed to hold out so few encouragements to the patriarch to settle in it; although the various trials to which he was exposed were exceedingly severe; and although we can conceive that, had he been left to himself, he might have been almost tempted to imagine that the way of the Almighty sometimes was hard; yet we find him still cleaving to the promises, and never doubting but they would in due time be verified. In this respect also we perceive the identity that subsists between the father of believers and his children. How little of the glory that is to be revealed are they permitted to partake of in this world! How many are the hardships they have to encounter in pursuing their journey toward the heavenly rest! How numerous are the trials by which they are beset just on account of their religion, and for nothing else! The whole of a man's history, from the time that he is influenced by divine grace to devote himself to Christ and to contend against sin, till he is removed from this earthly scene, is a series of trials. It is the design of God to have His children, like their great High Priest, made perfect through sufferings; and hence He tries their faith, that the trial of it, being more precious than of gold that perisheth, may be found unto praise, and honour, and glory at the appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is the design of God to have His children appear as so many witnesses for Him in this world: and hence He sends them afflictions in their persons, in their families, and otherwise,—afflictions which would bear them down and destroy them, if

they were obliged to combat them in their own strength. But by giving them grace to endure all these trials of His own sending, He makes it appear that it is not they, but Christ in them, who withstands, and perseveres, and overcomes, so that they are Christ's witnesses in the world.

IV. In the fourth place, Abraham was favoured with communications from on high which of themselves were sufficient to dignify him, and to separate him from the whole generation in which he lived.

Again and again the Lord appeared to him ; and it is impossible to read the narrative of his life without feeling that one of the great characteristics which make him eminent, even among the saints whose lives are recorded in the Scripture, is the intimacy he enjoyed with Jehovah, and the fulness of the revelations which were made to him. If there were no other example than his memorable pleading for Sodom, this remark would be justified ; but we find from the period when he was first called to the close of his long pilgrimage that he was favoured with communications from heaven. Now, here it may be said, How can there be identity established in this case between the father of believers and his children ? We answer, In no case can the identity be more clearly shown. The Lord makes communications to His people now, as full and as intimate as He made to Abraham. He does not indeed bring these communications to them in the same way as He did in the patriarchal times ; but He does bring them as really. It is through the written word that He now speaks to His people, and instructs them. It was by dreams and visions and such like means that He spoke to them of old. The *manner* of communication is changed, not the *substance*. See two persons set down to read the same passage of holy writ,—the one a believer ; the other, if you will, a formalist. Observe the difference. The one reads with a general understanding, it may be, of the meaning of what he reads, and with some passing convictions that he is reading what he *ought* inwardly to digest, and what condemns his present mode of life. But he rises from his task, and enters on his ordinary pursuits no wiser and no better than before. The

other reads, and feels that God is speaking to him. The truth comes home to his heart. He sees new meaning, and new force and beauty in the passage. It enlarges his views, it convinces him of sin, it reveals the course of duty, it confirms his faith. He as really receives a communication from heaven through that passage, as if Jehovah were personally addressing him. If there is any difference between his case and that of Abraham, it lies here : that Abraham was taught, as it were, by himself, whereas his children are taught from a book which is common to them all at the same time. Abraham's lessons came from heaven to him alone ; the lessons which his children receive come not to one, but to all. Because they are so free and so common, they may be little prized. But as our Lord says in the parable, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one should rise from the dead ; so we say, If ye refuse the lessons which God sends to you from heaven through His word, ye would have refused to believe in such communications as were addressed to Abraham. He would have remained and would have perished in the land of his fathers, if he had dealt with the divine word as unbelievers deal with it now.

I should have made some additional remarks in this sketch of the life of the father of believers, but the time forbids. I should have spoken of his occasional lapses through unbelief, faithful as he generally was. And here the identity that subsists between him and his children would have been, alas, but too clearly manifest. I should have spoken also of the *general* evidence which his life furnished of the holy tendency of his faith, notwithstanding of these occasional backslidings. But we must draw the subject to a close. This was Abraham's epitaph, that he died in a *good* old age. The identity which we have been referring to as subsisting between him and all his children would in many cases be partially destroyed, were it not for this word *good*. It was not the old age of the patriarch that constituted his excellency here. It was the *good* old age. And therefore it is in the matter of *goodness* that we would seek to have the likeness between him

and his spiritual children to consist. They must all be like him in their life. Partakers of the grace of God, like him they must desire the spiritual welfare of others; they must keep hold of the promises in the midst of all trials and discouragements; they must rejoice in the divine communications; they must with all their weaknesses persevere in well-doing, and give evidence of the work of the Spirit within them; and then, though they drop into the grave in youth, or in the very vigour of their days, they carry with them their identity to Abraham. If they die not in old age, as he did, they die in a *good* age, which forms the still more important feature of resemblance to him. Amen.

## IX.

### JACOB'S DREAM.<sup>1</sup>

‘And Jacob went out from Beer-sheba, and went toward Haran. And he lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night, because the sun was set ; and he took of the stones of that place, and put them for his pillows, and lay down in that place to sleep. And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven ; and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. And, behold, the Lord stood above it, and said, I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac : the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed ; and thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth ; and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south : and in thee, and in thy seed, shall all the families of the earth be blessed. And, behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again unto this land ; for I will not leave thee, until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.’—GEN. XXVIII. 10-15.

WE are now introduced to the history of Jacob, which may be truly said to be more full of incident, and of interest too, than that of any of the saints who went before him. The circumstances under which he is here for the first time presented to us as now entering upon the world for himself, and destined to act an important part in it, are such as to attract all our sympathies. We have seen that to his own and his mother's unjustifiable artifices is to be attributed the necessity now laid upon him of quitting his father's house as a solitary wanderer ; but while we acquiesce in the justice which marked out for him such a destiny, we do not feel the less that, as far as external things were concerned, the destiny was a hard one. It would not be difficult to draw such a picture of the commencement of Jacob's pilgrimage as might touch the feelings ; and yet, when we think of the causes which led to it, and of the share

<sup>1</sup> This is the thirty-second of the first series of Lectures on the Old Testament. —26th March 1843.

which he himself had in rendering it both expedient and necessary, we cannot help coming to the conclusion that it furnishes a manifest proof of God's determination to punish sin in His own people no less than in His enemies. We have here the heir of promises going forth upon a distant and perilous journey, without so much as a single attendant to bear him company. But why is this? Why is it that Jacob cannot command even such a retinue as waited upon Eliezer of Damascus, the steward of Abraham, when he was sent forth upon a similar journey? Why was it that Jacob had to steal away alone and unprotected from his father's house, when, with all the wealth which Isaac had acquired in addition to that which Abraham left behind him, he might have entered on his expedition so differently equipped? The only answer that can be given to these questions is: He had incurred the just resentment of his brother Esau by his deceit, and therefore he was compelled to go away by himself, that he might go without Esau's knowledge. His sin brought with it its own punishment. He had to suffer this and the various other evils to which he was exposed for the next twenty years, because he had forsaken the path of rectitude. There is one circumstance, however, which must not be lost sight of, that when he set out upon his journey he carried his father's blessing with him, and went in obedience to his father's commandment; and this certainly augured well for the ultimate success of the expedition. It was a journey that involved no little hardship; but it had a blessing on it at the same time, which ensured prosperity and comfort in the end.

Let us now, however, come more particularly to consider the verses which have been selected as the subject of this day's lecture. They bring before us the three following topics for remark: First, the circumstances under which the vision here described was afforded to Jacob; second, the nature of the vision itself; and thirdly, the particular promises which were made on this occasion to the wanderer.

I. Let us attend to the circumstances under which the vision here described was afforded to Jacob.

Vers. 10, 11 : ‘ And Jacob went out from Beer-sheba, and went toward Haran. And he lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night, because the sun was set ; and he took of the stones of that place, and put them for his pillows, and lay down in that place to sleep.’ The condition of Jacob as thus described was outwardly as helpless and destitute as could be well imagined. Affectionately and delicately nurtured in his youth, as the child of his mother’s love, and accustomed to enjoy all the conveniences and comforts of life in maturer years, while he dwelt in his father’s house ; he is now presented to us in the character of a fugitive, and in one sense an outcast, with neither a home in which to take refuge, nor a couch to rest upon. What could apparently be more inconsistent with his prospects as the heir of the promises than these words of the narrative, that he had to gather some stones together for his pillow when he slept at Bethel ? The hardships of his lot when thus for the first time he was thrown upon his own resources, and required to act for himself, were greater than those which either his father or Abraham had been destined to encounter in the same circumstances. And it would not have been wonderful if Jacob had been found complaining, and had been driven to the conclusion that these promises of which he had been made the depository must be little worth, when he himself, with them all transmitted to him, was so poorly provided for. It is in this way that worldly men reason when you speak to them of the promises of God. What will these promises do for us in the way of bettering our present condition ? they think within themselves ; and what *present* benefit do they confer upon those who profess to rest upon them ? If through the divine promises there lay a sure path to honour and temporal prosperity, *they* would cleave to them as gladly as any ; but because the acceptance of them does not necessarily secure these ends, yea, on the contrary, frequently obstructs them, they despise the promises, and prefer the things that are seen. Faith, on the other hand—and it is one of its peculiar characteristics—makes most of the promise, and feels its value most, under the pressure of present troubles, and when *externally* it might be thought to have least in actual possession. The time of trial and hard-



ship is the time of its special triumph; and when the aspects of providence are most lowering, it creeps, if we may so speak, most closely for shelter into the bosom of the God of providence. It was so in the case of Jacob. He was driven to a hard pass when he had to sleep upon a pillow of stone; but he lay down without fear and without murmuring, because he knew that he was the inheritor of the divine blessing.

Suppose now that while he slept, some company of travellers, far better provided than he with all the comforts necessary for a desert journey, had passed the place where he lay, and marked him stretched out without a covering, and with his head resting on his stony pillow. What would have been their judgment of him? A poor friendless outcast they would have esteemed him, some miserable sojourner, who had none to care for him, and who was in want of all things. They would have never recognised in him the heir of the promises, and the child of God. Any of the more humane among them might have been disposed, in the exuberance of their pity, to stop and awaken him from that uncomfortable slumber, and to give him a softer pillow for his head. It would have looked like an act of charity. Yes, it would have been reckoned a piece of kindness to have broken in upon his repose, and to have furnished him with some of the bodily comforts of which he seemed to be so destitute. Little would they have known, that to have aroused him at that time, even with the well-meant design of adding to his comfort, they would have dissipated one of the most glorious visions which mortal eye was ever privileged to look upon. And we doubt not but Jacob was happier with that vision, ill provided for and poorly lodged as he seemed to be, than he would have been without it in the midst of all the luxuries of life. It is interesting, indeed, at all times to mark how different are the judgments formed by worldly men and by the people of God of what constitutes enjoyment. When one is arrested by the Spirit, and turned from the path of sin into the way of life, worldly-minded friends are ready to pity him, and to express their sorrow that such an one should have been so infatuated as to cast the world behind him, and subject himself to all

the restraints and difficulties which are inseparable from a life of devotedness to Christ. Yea, and they would gladly, if they could, awaken him from his error as *they* esteem it, and would think they were acting kindly toward him, if they could but get him once more to relish and to approve of those things which they regard as indispensable to happiness. They look upon him as a dreamer and a visionary, and they are sorry that he should give up all that they count realities, and prefer the path of self-denial to the path of pleasure. Jacob was a dreamer when he slept on the ground with the stones for his pillow, but his dreams were things more excellent than all the realities of the world put together. And so, in like manner, let the followers of Christ be called visionaries by the unbelieving. Their visions are more substantial, and will prove more enduring, than the world itself; for when *it* passes away, and the lusts thereof, the things on which their hearts are set will be found imperishable as the throne of Jehovah is, on whose promise they rest.

But in these remarks we in some measure anticipate what will come afterwards to be spoken of. We should at present confine our view to the heir of the promises as he lay on the ground at Bethel an unprotected and friendless man. Never was any one more in need of assistance and direction from on high than he was at this time. It was peculiarly a time of difficulty,—just one of those seasons which, when they occur in the history of any of the people of God, lead men of unreflecting mind to imagine that there is no advantage to be reaped from entering upon the service of God. But as we have frequently had occasion before to speak of the seasonableness of the divine manifestations, so in this case we find the same thing illustrated. Jacob may be permitted to fall into the greatest straits, and to feel very keenly his own helplessness; but when he *is* brought low, the time arises for God to interpose in his behalf.

II. Let us now, then, in the second place, attend to the nature of the vision with which he was here favoured.

Ver. 12: ‘And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven; and behold

the angels of God ascending and descending on it. And, behold, the Lord stood above it.'

As might naturally be supposed, there have been various opinions given forth by commentators of Scripture as to the precise meaning of this remarkable dream or vision. I think there can be little doubt entertained with respect to the purpose it was immediately designed to answer in Jacob's case; and if we can fully understand *this*, we shall have the less difficulty in understanding the more general truth which it may be well supposed to embody. What, then, was the purpose which this vision was immediately designed to answer in Jacob's case? Evidently to show him that there was a way of communication between heaven and earth unseen and unmarked by the bodily eye, but not the less real and accessible on that account; and that in his behalf, and for his protection, there was a heavenly agency put forth adequate to all the emergencies to which he might be reduced. This is substantially the interpretation which Jewish writers themselves put upon the passage before us, and it is an interpretation which harmonizes well with all the circumstances of the case. A man compelled to flee from his father's house is shown that there is a way open to higher and holier mansions. A man without a guide in the desert, is shown that he may safely calculate upon receiving unerring guidance. An unprotected man beholds the hosts of heaven engaged as his protectors. These are obviously some of the most prominent truths conveyed to Jacob by this vision, and recognised by him as designed to be conveyed by it, as the vow which he made on the following morning evidently proves: 'If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, then shall the Lord be my God.' Now when we confine ourselves to this simple view of Jacob's vision, it suggests to us some very profitable subjects of remark. I take only the two following:—

First, from this glimpse which we get here into the secrets of the unseen world, it appears that the angels are interested in the well-being of God's people. As so many members of His intelligent and happy family, they rejoiced at first in the creation of man. 'The morning stars sang together, and all

the sons of God shouted for joy.' Sin has made a separation between them and the human race, but it has not destroyed the connection utterly. They look with interest still upon this world. There is joy among them over every sinner that repenteth, as an accession to the family of God. 'They encamp about the righteous, and encompass them.' 'They minister to the heirs of salvation.' And, on the other hand, by their agency punishments are inflicted on the wicked. David saw the destroying angel with the sword lifted against Jerusalem; and the impious host of the Assyrians fell in one night under the power of these unseen ministers of just vengeance. Then would it not be wise to worship them, and to pray to them, if they exercise such influence upon the lot of man? Nay, everything in its proper place. The worship of angels as well as of saints is idolatry. These exalted spirits are only the servants of God. Worship Him and fear Him, and their services will be secured for you. Acquaint yourselves with Him as He is revealed in Christ Jesus, and He will provide all the agency that is needful to carry you through grace to glory.

But my second remark here is, that from Jacob's vision it is obvious that heaven is a place of activity. He saw the angels ascending and descending,—some coming as it were from the presence of Jehovah to execute His mandates, and others returning after they had accomplished their work. This presents to us an interesting and also an instructive view of the regions of blessedness. When we turn our eyes downward, and look, through the discoveries of the word of God, into the dark abyss where the apostate spirits dwell, we behold there a perpetual and agonizing restlessness; but when we look upward by the help of the same discoveries, we perceive not restlessness, but holy activity. For every one of God's intelligent and sinless creatures there is a field of duty spread out, suited to their respective powers and natures; so that *that* state of quiescence or unbroken rest which some connect with the idea of the heavenly enjoyment, is altogether inconsistent with any right view of the subject as opened up in the word of God. Indeed, we cannot well conceive how beings endued with intelligence could be in a state of blessed-

ness, if there were no opportunity afforded for the exercise of their various faculties in working the work of God. These things then being so, it is most obvious that God's children upon earth display only the spirit which characterizes the inhabitants of a better world, when they devote themselves with untiring energy to the advancement of His cause and glory in the world, spending and being spent for Him. And thus, when we contemplate the career of the holy apostles and their fellow-labourers, or the labours of the devoted and self-denied missionaries of modern times, we have before us a picture not only of heroic, but rather of angelic enterprise. And those professed followers of Christ who shut themselves up in their retirements, and attend only to their own feelings and frames of mind, without attempting to throw one ray of light into a dark world, or to ameliorate the condition of the wretched, may indeed be free from some of the cares and anxieties with which a life of active exertion is sometimes beset; but they are also strangers to some of the highest luxuries which Christians are permitted to enjoy on this side the grave, and are destitute of one of the marks by which the family of God on earth is identified with His blessed family in heaven.

But now let us consider for a moment what may be the more general truth which Jacob's vision was designed to embody. And there can be little difficulty in arriving at a solution of this question. Jacob learnt from this vision that there was a way of communication open between heaven and earth, and that for him, a friendless wanderer, there was ample protection thus secured, go where he might. What information does it give to us now under the gospel age? It was a figurative representation to him of a great truth very needful for his comfort while he lay at Bethel. What does it represent figuratively to us, just as needful for our comfort? We say in answer, it represents the mediation of Christ. He is the ladder set on the earth whose top reacheth to heaven, affording access to the holiest of all for sinners previously condemned. This is the view taken of the subject by the best and soundest commentators of Scripture. This world, the scene of rebellion against Jehovah, was righteously cut off from all friendly intercourse with heaven. And never could

an acceptable prayer have been sent up from it, never could one of its inhabitants have reached that blessed sanctuary where love and holiness reign, had not God Himself in His mercy opened the way. And how was the way opened? Through Jesus Christ, whose human nature brought, if we may so speak, one end of this way of communication to the earth, and whose divine nature carried the other end to heaven; He Himself, as Immanuel, God with us, being thus the way, and the truth, and the life, through whom alone sinners can come to the Father. The connection between the two worlds is thus complete; and the intercourse may be carried on as truly as if it had never been disturbed. It is a singular mystery that is unfolded to us, when in this manner we contemplate the transactions at Bethel through the medium of the fuller discoveries of the gospel. The glory of the original vision is done away by reason of the glory that excelleth. I have often had occasion to remark how much more favourably we are placed in these latter days than the ancient saints were, while they had to pursue a similar pilgrimage; and how imperfectly believers feel this, or are sensible of their superior privileges and heavier responsibility. Perhaps some may even yet be found, who, on reading the account we here have of the vision with which Jacob was blessed, may be ready almost to envy him for having had so clear a view afforded him of the secrets of the unseen world. What would they not give for such a vision, and for so bright a display of the divine glory! Let such persons, then, consider this, that Jacob had only in figure what they have in reality; and that what came to him only as a vision in the night, is to them, if they would look at it, at all times plain and palpable as day. He saw only a ladder between heaven and earth; faith sees Christ the way of access to God. He was favoured with this vision only for one night, and in one place; faith has Christ its object at all times with it, and in all places. Let me beseech you to mark this point especially. Wherever the believer is, and in whatever circumstances, he has the way open to him by which he may find access to God. Christ is ever near him. And not only so: but let a sinner be sunk in the lowest depths, under painful convictions so intense and so humiliating

that he cannot conceive there should be any hope for him ; we say the foot of the ladder which reaches heaven is even beside him, for it goes down to the lowest depths of human degradation ; and if he will only lay hold and climb, or, without a figure, if he will only accept of Christ, he will be raised out of that fearful pit, and from the miry clay ; he will be carried upward, step by step ; he will enjoy the ministry of angels ; he will be received at last into Jehovah's very presence and glory. We are strongly tempted to linger yet a little longer upon this most interesting theme, but the time will not permit.

III. Let us now, in the third place, look at the particular promises which on this occasion were made to Jacob.

These consist, in the first place, of a repetition in fuller terms of the blessing which had been already put upon him by his father ; and then of some special blessings which were requisite for him in his present condition. On the first series of promises it is unnecessary to offer any general remarks in the meantime ; but there is one little clause here introduced which we cannot allow to pass without making it the subject of a few observations. In the 13th verse it is said, ' The land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed.' How strong the contrast here between what was and what was to be ! Jacob was compelled to sleep upon the cold ground at Bethel, while at the same time he is constituted lord of the whole soil. In his case it might have been said with great significance that night, ' It doth not yet appear what we shall be.' And so of all Christ's people. Their present condition is often as widely different as possible from what might be anticipated with respect to those on whom God looks down with complacency. So that to a careless spectator it might seem as if there were nothing more for believers than the mere words of promise, at least in the present life. Let it then be noted, that although, when Jacob lay down to sleep on this occasion, it would not have been easy to recognise in him the person on whom so large a blessing had shortly before been put by his father, guided by the Spirit of prophecy ; and although when he awoke from his sleep there was nothing externally to indicate that his circumstances had been changed,

yet he received on his humble resting-place a full earnest of that which would be, in the vision with which he was favoured. And so it is still with those who pursue the path of life. Their relationship to God cannot always be traced in the outward circumstances of their lot; for they may seem to be in want of all things. But they, too, have an earnest of the inheritance which is laid up for them in reversion. The Spirit dwells in them, working His blessed work, and producing His precious and holy fruits, so that they are well contented with their present lot, through the hope of what will come to them hereafter.

But we must pass on to consider the promises which were made to Jacob with reference to his present condition. Ver. 15: 'Behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again unto this land; for I will not leave thee until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.' There are *three* blessings conveyed to the wanderer in these words, which are equally the property of God's people in every age: first, God's presence with him; second, protection and guidance; and third, final deliverance from all trouble. We can only offer a few remarks under each of these heads.

1. God promises to be with Jacob. His hardships were only now beginning; but what an unspeakable comfort was it to be able, while they pressed more and more heavily on him, to recall these words, 'Behold, I am with thee!' People that have no experience in religion may perhaps be disposed to say, The promise sounds well enough; but if God is with a man, is not the evidence of His presence to be sought for in His exempting that man from trouble? Nay, we say, God's presence with His people is not to be proved by their exemption from afflictions and trials, because these are necessary for the perfecting of their graces, but by His supporting them under affliction, and imparting peace and comfort to them when all around may seem to be against them. The promise of His presence does not warrant them to suppose that they shall not be tried; but it warrants them to believe that His grace will be sufficient for them, and His strength made perfect in their weakness.



2. God promises protection and guidance to Jacob: 'I will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, and will bring thee again unto this land.' Well might the solitary pilgrim go forward with a cheerful heart, when he had this assurance, 'I will keep thee in all places whither thou goest.' These words threw a shield around him which no power on earth could set aside. Jehovah on that night declared Himself to be the keeper of Israel; and faith has fed upon that promise ever since. 'The Lord is thy keeper: the Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand. The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord shall preserve thee from all evil.' Jacob, when on his death-bed, could set his seal to the truth of this promise, when he testified that God had fed him all his life long, and that His angel had redeemed him from all evil.

3. God promises final deliverance to Jacob from all trouble. And He fulfilled His promise. His word is still the same. Christ loved His people from the beginning, and He will love them to the end.

My concluding remarks shall be, first, a few words of encouragement to those who would truly follow Christ, and then a few words of warning.

My friends, the commencement of your course may be, we had almost said must be, accompanied with much trouble. True religion generally strikes its roots in the heart in the midst of opposing influences both from within and from without. And amid the anguish of spirit which genuine repentance awakens, there may not be discernible a vestige of the glory and the enjoyment that are to follow. But the man who soweth in tears will reap in joy. The godly sorrow which a right feeling of the evil of sin awakens in the heart, is, as it were, the planting of the foot on the first step of the ladder which leads to heaven. It is a step most difficult. And so are many of the succeeding ones. For as one rises in that passage to the world of bliss, he must cast away all the sins that hang as weights about him, that he may rise still higher. But let him not fear. The pathway is secure; and if he will but look up, he will see a gracious hand beckoning him to

advance ; if he will but listen, he will hear a soothing voice saying to him, ' Behold, I am with thee, and will keep thee in all the way whither thou goest, and will not leave thee until I have done that which I have spoken to thee of.'

Yet I cannot close without adding a word or two of warning, drawn from this remarkable passage of the sacred history, which speaks of a ladder reaching from heaven to earth. Every man who has any religious feeling or belief at all, thinks that he will reach heaven at last. And many will reach it who at this moment may seem to be far out of the way. But look, I beseech you, my friends, at the figurative description given in the text of the pathway that leads to heaven. It makes known very solemn and impressive realities. We may read it as a mere piece of history, that Jacob saw this ladder reaching to heaven, and the angels ascending and descending, and the Lord at the top of it looking down ; and we may regard the whole description as embodying the condescension and care of the Lord for His distressed people. And so we have said it does. But then it must not be forgotten that this vision shows us not only that there is a communication established between heaven and earth, but also that before we can enter into heaven and partake of its blessedness, we must have to do with Him who, as the text expresses it, is at the top of the ladder looking down. Ah, sinner, you would gladly gain the summit of that glorious ascent, and be the companion of the angels, who bask in the light of Jehovah's countenance. But you cannot be received among them till you have received the seal of the Holy One. Amen.

## X.

### THE CHARTER OF THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH.<sup>1</sup>

‘And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost ; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you : and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.’—  
MATT. XXVIII. 18-20.

MY brethren, it is with unfeigned pleasure that I meet you here this day, although the circumstances under which we meet, externally at least, are very different from those under which we were assembled together three weeks ago. An event has taken place during that short interval which has altered certain most important relations in which we stood toward other parties ; which has put us in a new position as members of the church of Christ, and which will produce consequences more important than the most far-sighted among us can well anticipate, without renouncing one article of our creed, yea, rather in consequence of cleaving more closely to these articles. We are no longer members of the Church by law established ; we have given up what has been called her *privileges*, because it has been found that, in order to their enjoyment, we must consent to place ourselves under an unscriptural servitude ; and we occupy at this moment precisely the same ground which our forefathers occupied, when at the period of the Reformation they stood forth with their Bibles in their hands, appealing to them as the only standard of their faith, and the only directory of their conduct. *They* had indeed trials and difficulties to contend with for many years, more severe than any which may come upon *us*. The great law of religious toleration was un-

<sup>1</sup> The first sermon Dr. Davidson preached (4th June 1843) after the Disruption.

known in *their* day, while most people *profess* to feel its obligations now. The civil powers persecuted *them*; they only *frown* upon *us*. But should these powers become more hostile than they now are, it is to be hoped that, in support of the same principles which were maintained in the midst of a *deadly* struggle in former generations, there will be some found to stand fast at any sacrifice even in this generation. If times of trouble and suffering come, God will have His witnesses ready. Meanwhile we are in security, and, thanks to our fellow-Christians who have sympathized with us in our present difficulties, we are here in comfort. I speak with reference to the *place* and circumstances of our present meeting. There may be some among us, indeed, who, from the influence of early prejudices and associations, may feel as if they had come down from a higher to a lower position,—as if they had lost somewhat of respectability in connecting themselves with those who are no longer members of the Establishment; but it is to be hoped that these are but few in number. And for my own part, I feel an elevation, a comfort and peace of mind, in being now at perfect liberty to act upon those principles which from the first have been written among the articles of the Church of Scotland,—a comfort and peace of mind which are worth far more than any secular advantage which an Establishment can confer. To have opportunities of proclaiming the whole counsel of God, and of maintaining intercourse with those to whom it is proclaimed without those distracting secular engagements which render the keeping up of such intercourse a thing almost impossible, is to the mind of a minister of the gospel most refreshing; and this satisfaction is still more enhanced when the tie that binds pastor to people is discovered to be something closer than that which merely draws so many persons into the same place from Sabbath to Sabbath, just because it is the place where they have been accustomed to worship; something closer than that which puts two parties in this cold and formal relation toward each other, that the one is the appointed conductor of religious worship, and the others are the worshippers. I say, the mind of a minister of the gospel is beyond all expression refreshed and cheered, when he finds that the tie which binds him and

his people together is that of their holding common principles, and being animated by mutual affection. One does not grudge to encounter a few difficulties, when they pave the way to the attainment of a result so delightful and so precious. As I have been led to offer these few preliminary remarks in consequence of our being at present assembled in circumstances entirely new to us, and in a new position, there is one other point to which I would for a moment refer, bearing upon the same subject. It will be in the remembrance of many now hearing me, that on the last occasion when we met together in our former place of worship, it was stated that up till that time no direct reference had been made on the Lord's day to the all-absorbing controversies which for some years have agitated the church and people of this land, and which have now been brought to an end in a way at the least not dishonourable to us, nor calculated to throw a stain either upon our integrity or upon the sincerity of our Christian professions, our adversaries themselves being judges; and now I would take this opportunity of stating again that a similar course will be pursued in our altered circumstances. At the same time, I cannot help thinking that even some who may have resolved to worship with us are not sufficiently aware how thoroughly and firmly the Presbyterian form of worship and church government, and the peculiar principles which have formed the subject of our church controversy, are based upon the word of God. This may render it expedient for us, when we have the opportunity, to deliver, as we have long desired to do, a series of discourses upon these subjects on some evenings throughout the week. But on the Sabbath-day we would wish you to assemble as if nothing strange had happened to you; and we would wish also to address you as if nothing strange had happened to us, propounding only those doctrines and enforcing those duties which, by the operation of the Spirit, will conduce to the convincing and converting of sinners, and to the building up of saints in comfort and in holiness. I would wish to speak to you, brethren, with all freedom and plainness upon this subject. When men's minds are heated by any great and important controversy, they are in danger of bringing out their feelings and opinions on all

occasions in connection with that controversy, as if there were nothing else worth speaking or worth thinking of. Whether the matter controverted refer to things spiritual or temporal, it is all the same. Everything else is left out of view in the urging of that which is the engrossing topic for the time. Now such a course of proceeding as this we would exceedingly deprecate in our present circumstances. The great object which every minister of the gospel is required to aim at is the salvation of souls through the instrumentality of the word of God. That object must never be lost sight of. The beginning and the ending of a gospel ministry is the preaching of Christ and Him crucified, the wisdom of God and the power of God unto salvation. Emergencies may arise when some one article of the Christian faith, called in question by the enemies of the truth, must for a season be more prominently brought forward than in ordinary circumstances would be requisite; but still ministers must not forget that they are ambassadors for Christ, beseeching men in Christ's stead to be reconciled unto God. This their great work must be prosecuted with unceasing effort and with undivided aim. And therefore, momentous as may be the results of that controversy in which we have been engaged, and important the place which it occupies in our thoughts, we would desire to keep it in due subordination to those other truths which lie more immediately at the root of the question how a sinner may find acceptance with God, and how the people of God must walk before Him. Occasions there will be, both special and ordinary, when we shall have to enforce the doctrine of Christ's headship over the church, and of His authority over all earthly principalities and powers; and to denounce the sin of resisting His word, and placing His church in bondage. It is impossible to contemplate aright the kingly office of the Lord Jesus, or to survey the privileges which He has conferred upon His church, or to read the prophetic intimations of what the church is to be, and of the aid which the powers of this world are to render her, without being brought in contact at every point of such a review with those principles for the sake of which we have become members of a protesting church, instead of being, as we were, members of a church by law

established. And therefore it will be impossible for us to lay before you the whole system of revealed truth, without adverting from time to time to those great scriptural principles, for the maintaining of which we have left the position we occupied, and taken up that which we now hold. But let this stand as the substance of what we would desire to state with reference to the course which we are henceforth to pursue, that it shall still be our grand object to preach Christ crucified, and to urge upon your attention the work of the Holy Spirit,—not going out of our way to seek for topics connected with these present controversies, but at the same time not shunning to handle them when they come before us, as they must often do, in our regular expositions of the word of God.

With these observations, then, I would now proceed to consider the verses which have been selected as the subject of discourse. They do relate to that great question to which, as a church, we are called specially to bear witness. And it is for this reason that they have been chosen as the subject of our meditations on the present occasion; in order that, as we left a testimony behind us when we worshipped together for the last time in another place, we may raise that testimony again, now that we are worshipping together for the first time in this place.

‘And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.’

These words contain in short compass what may be called the charter of the Christian church; and they shed a most instructive light upon the leading subject of our great controversy. It is quite impossible for us to set before you at such length as is desirable, all the truths which are embodied in this comprehensive passage; and we shall therefore content ourselves with a general survey of those which are most prominent. The text may be divided into three compart-

ments, which, in the order in which they stand, are as follows:—First, we have the unlimited and incontrollable power of Christ as King of the church asserted in these words, ‘All power is given to me in heaven and in earth;’ secondly, we have, as resulting from this power and authority of the Lord, the commission which the apostles received, together with the nature and extent of that commission, in the words, ‘Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them with water in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you;’ and then, in the third place, we have the comforting promise by which they, and all the ministers of Christ after them, were to be encouraged in the prosecution of their work, ‘Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.’

I. In the first place, then, we have the unlimited and incontrollable power of Christ as King of the church asserted in these words, ‘All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.’

In consequence of our Lord’s voluntary humiliation, and as the reward of it, the whole government of this world is committed to Him, as Mediator between God and man. This truth is declared in many passages of Scripture. ‘Because He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross; therefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name.’ ‘We see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour, after that by the grace of God He had tasted death for every man.’ All these things, indeed, had been announced by prophecy ages before: ‘Unto us a child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government shall be upon His shoulders.’ ‘Therefore will I divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong; because He hath poured out His soul unto death: and He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.’ So that our Lord only verified the predictions of the prophets, when, after His re-



surrection from the dead, which formed the unimpeachable evidence that He had accomplished His great work according to the will of God, He said, 'All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth.' The great doctrine which for the comfort of His church is declared in these words, is to this effect, that He who is God-man superintends the affairs of this world in which we live, being surety to the Father on the one hand for the people who have been given to Him, and armed with all power on the other hand to take vengeance on those who know Him not, and obey not His gospel. The Father hath committed all judgment unto the Son, that all men should honour the Son even as they honour the Father. Now there could not be a more consoling doctrine than this to the people of God. That He who died for them should reign over them; that He who wears their nature in heaven should have absolute and unlimited control over all the affairs of earth; that He who is touched with the feeling of their infirmities should have in His own hand the regulation of every event that concerns them, cannot but be to them a subject of unspeakable satisfaction and delight. It is one of those truths, indeed, which unfold at once the dignity, the security, and the blessedness of the faithful followers of Christ. *Their dignity*; because we are elsewhere told, that they are united by the tie of brotherhood to Him who in this passage declares that He is invested with all power in heaven and in earth. *Their security*; for what can pluck them out of the hand of Him who is exalted far above all principalities and powers, and every name that is named? And *their blessedness*; for what can be wanting to complete the enjoyment of those who are united to Him, who holds at His disposal all that is in earth and in heaven that can minister to His people's happiness? This doctrine, that Christ is exalted as a Prince and a Saviour, having all power committed to His hand, is one that every believer must delight to linger on. It presents the whole economy of providence under a new aspect to him. It renders events and vicissitudes, which regarded by themselves might seem charged with unmingled gloom and terror, not only not terrible to him, but even matter of rejoicing. One cannot help thinking, indeed, what a bleak and comfort-

less world this must be to those who have no interest in Christ, and who can claim no relationship to Him. The sun shines and the rain descends upon them—they obtain their share of all the common bounties of Providence; but they remain in ignorance of Him to whom all their mercies are to be attributed. And should any reverse befall them, and times of suffering come, as come they will, perhaps when they are not looked for, they do not know to whom they should apply in prayer for deliverance from their troubles. They are virtually without God in the world, when they are without Christ. There is no access to the Father but by Him. There is no exertion of divine power but through Him, as far as we in this planet are concerned. To have the knowledge of Christ is to have the knowledge of God, according to the declaration of Scripture; and therefore not to know Christ is not to know God, and of all miseries that is certainly the greatest. There can be no prayer, there can be no good hope, there can be no well-grounded comfort, to those who know not Christ. But to those who do know Him and serve Him, all these blessings belong, and others innumerable besides. One sentence sums up their privileges: ‘they are Christ’s;’ and to Him is given all power in heaven and in earth.

II. But now, in the second place, let us look to the commission which Christ, as possessing all power and authority, here gives to the apostles, as also to the nature and extent of this commission: ‘Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations,’ etc.

It is very obvious that this commission, although immediately addressed to the apostles, was not limited to them. The promise with which it was accompanied, ‘Lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the world,’ of itself shows that what Christ said to the faithful few by whom He was surrounded, was designed to be equally applicable to all who might come after them as preachers of the gospel and office-bearers in the church, even to the end of time. Common reason also shows that this must have been the design of the precept here enjoined; because, as all nations are comprehended under the commission, the work of carrying the gospel to them is a work which cannot be overtaken by the mini-

sters of one age, but which comes down as by delegation to the ministers of every age, along with the gracious promise annexed. But it is unnecessary to say more upon this topic, as no person will controvert the general principle which we here lay down, that Christ's words in the text are not to be limited to the parties whom He immediately addressed, but are to be understood with reference to all who are set apart for the work of the gospel ministry, and who give themselves thereto under the direction and guidance of the Holy Spirit. What I would wish you more particularly to attend to under this head, is just the obvious fact, that it is from Christ as the Head of the church, and from Him alone, that the commission of ministers of the gospel to exercise their office flows: 'All power is given unto *me* in heaven and in earth: go ye *therefore* and teach all nations.' From Christ's power comes the commission to His ambassadors, and on *His* power it is based. There might be ample room for remark here; but as we have not time to enter into particulars, we must rest satisfied with a general view of the subject. And therefore we would at present only place it before you under this aspect, that beyond all question the ministers of the gospel are Christ's servants, and derive all their authority in the performance of their functions from Christ. He has *all* power committed to Him, and power therefore to send forth servants in His name, beseeching men to be reconciled unto God. And it is as His servants that they must enter upon their work, looking to His authority as their warrant, to His word as their directory, and to His blessing as the only means of their success. All this, however, it may be said, although completely applicable to the apostles who were sent forth by Christ Himself, is not so obviously applicable in the case of those who are appointed to preach the gospel now. And certainly there is one great point of difference. The word does not now come directly from Christ to any one, Go forth and proclaim to sinners the way of salvation; the commission is not *now* granted, as it was on the occasion referred to in the text, *immediately* by the great Head of the church, in whom all power is vested. But yet, after all, though there is in this respect a striking difference between the *mode* in which Christ's ambassadors are now ap-

pointed, and that in which they were appointed by Himself while He was on earth, there *is* no difference ; and no difference can be recognised between them in this other respect, that they are equally *His* servants, and equally hold their commission from *Him*. It is borne in upon the spirit of a man, that he should devote himself to the work of the ministry. He sets himself to that course of study which will qualify him for the preaching of the gospel. He presents himself to those who bear rule in the church, as a candidate for the office of the holy ministry. They take trial of his gifts and qualifications, and in Christ's name grant him authority to preach the gospel ; or, with due regard to all scriptural rules, ordain him to take the oversight of some portion of the church of Christ. To Christ, then, he looks up as his Master ; to His law exclusively he seeks to conform all his ministrations, and from Him he expects the blessing upon his work. But if any third party were to step in and to say, This person must not be ordained to the work of the ministry in this or that particular charge, except upon certain specified conditions ; and if these conditions are complied with, then he shall have so much for his support,—and if in the setting of him apart to the sacred office such conditions were attended to, and accounted of sufficient weight to facilitate or to frustrate his appointment to the ministerial work, then would the inference be manifest, that it was not by Christ's authority, but by some other authority, that such a minister held his commission. You will easily perceive the application of these remarks to our present circumstances. We would have all matters connected with the appointment of gospel ministers regulated by the word of God as expounded in the standards of our church ; we would have the law of Christ to be paramount : 'All power is given unto me : go ye *therefore* and teach ;' another party comes in and says, As from us you derive your temporal emoluments and advantages, our will must be the rule of your procedure in all these matters. Now we cannot submit to such dictation, and therefore it is that we are here.

2. But let us now look for a moment at the extent of the mission which Christ gives His servants : 'Go and teach all nations.' To the same effect it is said in another place,

‘Preach the gospel unto every creature.’ Now it will be seen at once that this precept, as bearing upon individual effort, is physically impracticable. As bearing upon churches, however, it points out the course of duty which they are bound to pursue in employing every effort to send forth the heralds of salvation to every nation under heaven. And it conveys at least this lesson to individuals, and specially to ministers, that as they have opportunity they should strive by all means, in all places, to win souls to Christ. All nations have been conveyed to Him by the gift of the Father to be brought under His mediatorial government,—as it is said in the second Psalm, ‘I will give Thee the heathen for Thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for Thy possession.’ To make good this gift, Christ sent forth His ministers at the first, with the injunction, ‘Go and teach all nations.’ Looking at this injunction in its plain and obvious meaning, no reasonable man can doubt but it makes it imperative on every minister of Christ to preach Christ as he has opportunity. No man dares say, with these words before him, I shall confine my labours within this little spot, and beyond its limits I will never go as Christ’s ambassador; and no church dares say, in appointing a minister to any district, Here, and here only, you shall labour. There may be, and there are, good reasons for assigning to each workman a special part of the vineyard to cultivate; but there can be no good reason for preventing him, when in providence he has opportunity, without any prejudice to his own particular field, from plucking out the weeds which he sees luxuriating in other parts. And if any power is put forth against him for so doing, he must just fall back upon the commission given him by his Master, or upon the weighty sentence of the apostle, which breathes the spirit of that commission: ‘Necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!’

3. Let us just glance for an instant at the *nature* of the commission which the Lord here gives His servants.

If we had time to speak fully of this matter, much might be said upon it. But, passing by the various topics connected with the commandment to baptize in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, which

might be enlarged upon, I would direct your attention to this point, that Christ enjoins His servants to teach the people 'all things whatsoever He had commanded them.' Here, then, we have in language most precise the standard laid down according to which the ministers of the gospel are to be regulated in the execution of their important functions: 'Whatsoever Christ hath commanded in His word' they are to teach, and nothing besides, either more or less. And frequent and most solemn are the charges delivered to them to adhere to this standard: 'Whosoever shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven.' 'If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book. And if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life.' Such are some of the charges addressed to those who are put in trust with the gospel; and when one reads them, and thinks of the awful responsibility which they involve, the reflection at once arises, 'Who is sufficient for these things?' There are indeed certain parts of revealed truth relatively more important than other parts; there are some doctrines which require to be urged more frequently and pressed upon men's acceptance more earnestly than others; but there is no truth contained in the word of God which a minister of the gospel is at liberty to conceal. His grand pattern in the discharge of his office, as in the regulation of his whole life, is Christ Himself. He appeared on earth as the servant of the Father, and He appealed on all occasions to the will and authority of the Father for what He taught. 'I have not spoken of myself,' He says; 'but the Father who sent me, He gave me a commandment, both what I should say, and what I should speak.' Again, in the prayer which He offered up before He was apprehended by His enemies, He says, 'I have given unto them the words which Thou gavest me.' And so then, in like manner, the ministers of the gospel, as the servants of Christ, must take the word from His mouth, and proclaim no other doctrines than those which He has put before them in the Holy Scripture, neither adding to what is written there, nor

taking aught away from it. And should they be placed in such a position as that they are not at liberty to teach, and to act upon their teaching of what they find revealed in the book of God, in that position they dare not remain. It is for this, among other reasons, that we are in this place this day.

III. Now let us look for a little, in the last place, at the promise by which the ministers of Christ are encouraged in the prosecution of their work : ‘ Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world.’

You will all at once perceive that these words are precisely equivalent to the declaration which the Lord had made a short time before : ‘ When I go away I will send unto you the Comforter, who shall abide with you for ever.’ It is the presence of the Spirit with the church that is promised in the text, and it is His presence that constitutes the life and the glory of the church. But as I shall advert to this subject in the evening, I would in the meantime confine my attention to this point, which well deserves to be noticed, that the promise before us is not *absolutely* given, but is to be interpreted in connection with the preceding context ; that is to say, our Lord’s words are not to be understood as conveying an assurance that wherever there is a body of persons, larger or smaller, associated together under the name of a Christian church, the presence of His Spirit among them will be experienced quickening the dead among them, and guiding them into all truth ; but they are to be understood in this way, that when the followers of Christ, united together as a body in subjection to Him who has all power in heaven and in earth, are found holding and observing all things whatsoever He has commanded them, then and in that case they may look for the presence and the blessing of His Spirit. It is in this respect with churches as it is with individuals. If a man calling himself a Christian walks in direct opposition to the law of Christ, that man cannot have the Spirit ; and if a church calling itself a church of Christ is not framed and regulated according to His law, the Spirit of Christ cannot be there, and therefore there can be no life there. It must therefore be our grand object to have the framework of our church

erected, and the whole administration of its affairs conducted according to the pattern which is set down in the word of God, that, teaching and observing whatsoever Christ hath commanded us to do, we will find his promise verified : ‘Lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the world.’

Now, in conclusion, brethren, I would beseech you to guard against one temptation to which, in your present circumstances, you are peculiarly exposed. When men have maintained any great principle, and consented to make some sacrifices for it, they are in danger of esteeming themselves better than others, just because they have so acted, and of being puffed up with spiritual pride. Remember the text, ‘God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.’ Ye appear in one sense as witnesses for Christ, at least for one great truth which He has revealed : that He is the Head of the church, and that in the church His law must be held supreme. But your witnessing for this truth will not save your souls. A man may give his body to be burned, and yet be nothing. Christ’s witnesses are *living* men,—those whom the Spirit of God hath quickened, who live in the Spirit and walk in the Spirit, and manifest to the world all the fruits of the Spirit. Amen.



## XI.

### THE OUTPOURING OF THE SPIRIT.

‘ He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass ; as showers that water the earth.’—Ps. LXXII. 6.

THE psalmist is here speaking of the enjoyment which flows from the visitations of Christ to His church in grace and love. There has never been any doubt entertained that this psalm is prophetical of Christ, and that the blessings of His reign, the glory of His kingdom, and the extent of His dominion are here set forth by the inspired penman. The verse which has been selected as the text is descriptive, as we have said, of the peculiar enjoyment and blessedness which Christ’s church, or any part of it, derives from the manifestations which He affords of His favour. And it may be observed that these manifestations are not here spoken of as confined to any particular period of the church’s history. Every one, for instance, will at once perceive that the remarkable outpouring of the Spirit which took place on the day of pentecost was a verification of the prophecy in the text ; but it is just as obvious that this glorious event did not form the complete fulfilment of the prophecy, because this passage is set down in the midst of other predictions that refer to a more prosperous era in the history of the kingdom of Christ than has yet been witnessed,—even that when all the nations shall be subject to the authority of Messiah. And as it will be then specially that the words shall be verified, ‘ He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass,’ while at the same time, in His gracious visitations of the church in time past, we cannot but see these words illustrated, it is very obvious that we may justly regard the text as containing *a promise* the verification of which may, to a certain extent, be looked for and

pled for in every age by Christ's faithful people. *So much* has been already done, and so much more remains to be done ; we who stand between what *has* been and what is to be, may without presumption seek for our own share of these great blessings. The field is the world ; and when the times of refreshing are fully arrived, over the whole of that field shall Christ come down like rain upon the mown grass,—the whole shall He water as the showers that water the earth. But in the meantime there is this and the other small enclosure waiting for the former and latter rain ; and should not what is to be done upon the wide scale afterwards encourage us to hope that something corresponding will be done upon the narrower scale now ? If the whole world is to be refreshed by the blessing of Christ, why not at present this little section here assembled ? why not every congregation in our church ? why not every community of the faithful throughout the earth ? Most certain it is that the text furnishes no ground for doubt upon this matter when it says, ' He shall come down like rain upon the mown grass ; as showers that water the earth.'

If time permitted, we might enlarge upon the beauty of the figure which the psalmist here employs to mark a visitation of divine love and grace ; and, even as it is, we cannot wholly pass it by. There are two opposite classes of ideas called up in our minds by the very reading of the words, although that which is pleasurable drives away that which is painful. We have first the image presented to us of an extensive field, from which the grass cut down and withered has been carried away, and the remaining stubble lies parched and dead under the scorching sun. Such is the aspect of the church when the cheering presence of the Saviour is withdrawn or not experienced at any particular period. The members become cold or lukewarm, and the ministrations and ordinances are accompanied with no lively efficacy. But the prospect is altered. The refreshing shower, followed by the gladdening sunshine, comes down upon the parched field ; and how beautiful the change ! Every fibre becomes possessed, as it were, with a new vitality ; a fresh mantle of verdure covers the withered and arid waste, and the eye is delighted with the loveliness and

freshness of the scene. Such is the aspect of the church when Christ smiles upon the labours of His ministers, and revives the languishing graces of His people,—the wilderness is then transformed into the garden of the Lord: ‘He comes down like rain upon the mown grass; as showers that water the earth.’

But now let us endeavour, by the divine blessing, to gather from this interesting passage some lessons that may be profitable. Out of the many subjects of meditation that are suggested by it, we select the following: First, that Christ’s gracious visitations are essential to the comfort and prosperity of the church; and secondly, that we are warranted to look for them; then, in the third place, I would advert to some of the means which must be employed in order to obtain them. To these three topics let me briefly call your attention.

I. In the first place, Christ’s gracious visitations are essential to the comfort and prosperity of the church.

This doctrine is evidently taught in the text. The church, without the manifestations of Christ’s presence and grace, is, like the mown grass, languishing for heaven’s moisture. Favoured with these manifestations, it is like a field which the Lord hath blessed, having plenty of the fatness of the earth, and of the dew of heaven from above. We have the same beautiful similitude employed by the prophet Hosea, where he says, ‘His going forth is prepared as the morning; and He shall come unto us as the rain, as the former and latter rain unto the earth.’ So also speaks Isaiah: ‘I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring: and they shall spring up as among the grass, as willows by the water courses.’ Now it is to be noticed, and the doctrine is familiar to you all, that it is by the ministration of the Holy Spirit that Christ manifests Himself to His church; and that when He is said to come like rain upon the mown grass, this is not to be understood of any personal appearance which He makes to His people, but of His sending to them the Comforter, whose work it is to quicken and instruct and sanctify; and, in a word, to dis-

charge all those gracious offices to the church now which Christ discharged during His personal ministry. The passage above quoted from Isaiah brings the doctrine fully out: 'I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my Spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring.' The figurative expressions used in the first part of this verse are interpreted in the latter part: the pouring of water and the sending of floods are declared to mean the pouring out of the Spirit and the imparting of the divine blessing. Christ's gracious visitation, then, we have said,—that is, His sending of the Spirit to revive and instruct and sanctify,—is essential to the comfort and prosperity of the church. This is a doctrine which cannot be too strongly, and we would almost say too frequently, urged upon the attention of the members of the church of Christ. Were you to propose the question to the greater part of those who profess some attachment to the cause of religion, Wherein consist the comfort and prosperity of the church? they would answer that question by saying, that as to *comfort*, when they had all the means of worship as to time, place, and regular administration provided for them, they sought nothing more; and as to *prosperity*, the great element in that case was to be sought for in the number and influence of the worshippers. Now all these things, we readily admit, may be taken into view when an estimate is formed of the comfort and prosperity of any section of Christ's church on earth; but to judge of the state of the church on these and similar grounds, would carry us to the most erroneous and unscriptural conclusions. Have any of the rulers or chief men believed in Christ? was the question in our Lord's day. And afterwards, when His apostles and those who cleaved to their doctrine were compelled to meet together for the worship of God under circumstances where even life itself was hazarded by their so doing, all those ideas which we connect with the word *comfort* could then have found no place. Yet when was the church more truly comfortable and more truly prosperous than in the days of the apostles? Not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, were employed in the glorious work of calling sinners to a participation in the blessings of Christ's

purchase; and not many wise or mighty or noble were among the called. But still we find such sentences as these in the volume of unerring truth: After the conversion of Paul it is said, 'Then had the churches rest throughout all Judea, and Galilee, and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.' And previously to that time, even when persecution raged against them, we read that the apostles, 'continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.' Now these and such like passages may be sufficient to show us that those persons who look only at the external circumstances and condition of the church in order to form a judgment of its comfort and prosperity, are chargeable with most grievous error. All may be well outwardly: there may be crowds of worshippers; there may be the undisturbed enjoyment of gospel ordinances; there may be a certain homage rendered by the wealthy and powerful to these ordinances; and yet there may be no real good effected, as far as the great objects are concerned for which the church is set up in the world. For what purpose, let me ask, is the church set up? and what is her proper work—the object at which she should ever aim, and without the accomplishment of which she fails to answer the end for which Christ has given her a place in the world? Evidently this: that sinners may be enlightened, convinced, converted, comforted, and built up in holiness through faith unto eternal life. The church is prosperous just in proportion as these purposes are answered through her instrumentality; and she enjoys comfort precisely in the same proportion. And how is it that these ends are accomplished? by what agency is this illumination and conviction and edification effected? Is it by the mere enjoyment of ordinances? No; for all ordinances were observed by the church with the most scrupulous exactness during the time of Christ's sojourning upon earth; and yet at no period was there greater barrenness in that spiritual fruit which is to the praise and glory of God! Is it by any gifts

or powers of those who minister in holy things that the most desirable result of a flourishing church is brought about? No: 'For Paul may plant, and Apollos may water, but God giveth the increase.'

Let these two conclusions, then, my friends, be firmly fixed in our minds: that we, as a branch of Christ's church, are not prosperous unless the great work of the conversion of souls is advancing among us; and that this work cannot advance unless Christ our Head send to us His Spirit, with all the gracious operations of that heavenly agent. You must feel—all of you who take an interest in the progress of vital religion—that you need for your own personal establishment and advancement in the faith, the quickening energy of the Comforter; and when you look to the state of religion generally among those who make a profession of it, you must feel still more strongly, that the church at large is, like the field, withering and languishing for the refreshing shower, and ready to die unless the Spirit be sent down, like the rain upon the mown grass. There are some people terrified at the thought of any awakening or reviving in the church. Their own cold formality,—the name without the life, the shadow without the substance of Christianity,—their own cold formality makes them shrink from the very thought of being disturbed from their slumber. Alas! this coldness and deadness are very widely spread; so much so, that when we sit down sometimes to reflect upon the state of things among us *spiritually* as a congregation, and when we enlarge our view, and take in the state of religion in our land,—when we think of the professed destination of the worshippers of God, and of the awful reality that so many will come short of eternal life, and will sink into the grave unprepared for the judgment that is to follow,—we feel that the only safety of the church, and the only glimmering of light that rests upon this dark picture, is to be found in such passages as that which we have in the text: 'He will come down as the rain upon the mown grass, and as the showers that water the earth.' O brethren, let us awaken from our indifference, and lay hold by faith of this cheering statement. What a precious opportunity have we afforded to us for so doing in the coming solemnities

of a communion Sabbath, and all the exercises therewith connected !

II. In the second place, I have to notice, we are warranted to look for gracious visitations to the church.

Let us fasten our minds strongly upon this point. The two words *promise* and *prophcey* have in one respect this signification in common, that they enumerate works which God *is* to work, or blessings which He *is* to bestow ; and so far, therefore, it matters little whether we set down certain passages of the divine word under the head of promises or of prophecies. But there is a very striking difference in the feelings with which even believers in Christ are disposed to regard the one class of passages and the other. *Prophecies* are supposed to lie beyond the range of our own personal concerns and interests. We look upon them as pertaining either to times gone by, wherein they can be proved to have had their accomplishment ; or to times yet future, wherein they *are* to be verified. We do not think of them as bearing upon our own individual circumstances and well-being, and so our prayers for their fulfilment are very vague, or at least very general. It is otherwise with respect to those blessings which are clearly reducible to the head of *promise*, and which are necessary for the present enjoyment and advancement of all believers. These we take hold of, and plead for as immediately affecting ourselves ; and prayer for the fulfilment of them is proportionably warm and persevering. Now, my brethren, what I would wish you to feel in connection with the text is, that it is not to be regarded as a *prophcey* pertaining merely to the future, but, as has been already hinted in the introductory remarks, as a statement which has been verified already in the history of the church, and which *may* be verified also in like manner at the present day. Let this consideration have its due weight with you, and be persuaded to act upon it.

Just notice for a moment, more particularly, how vast is the difference with respect to feeling and interest wherewith one would look at the words before us, when they are viewed as a prediction that has reference to future times, and as a promise the accomplishment of which may be experienced

*now.* When viewed as a prediction, they lead us only to think of the blessed change that will be wrought upon the condition of the church in ages which we shall not be privileged to see, and at the very utmost they can thus only excite in us such longing as that which our Lord refers to when He says, that ‘many kings and righteous men desire to see and hear those things which were brought to pass in the gospel age, and were not permitted.’ But when we view the psalmist’s words as a promise that may be realized in any period of the church’s history, then they encourage us to indulge in such reflections as these: Are these blessings, so important, within the reach of every congregation of Christ’s worshippers?—then why may not we look and plead for our share of them? Has He promised thus to come for the refreshment and the spiritual adornment of His church?—then why may not we seek to have our souls refreshed, and our graces enlivened by the visitations of His Spirit? In a word, my brethren, we would have you dwell upon this beautiful passage as promising something *to you*, and therefore as calling upon you to entreat for the fulfilment, that Christ may do as He hath said by the prophet Ezekiel He *will* do, in these striking words: ‘I will make the places round about my hill a blessing; and I will cause the shower to come down in his season, and there shall be showers of blessing.’ But further, not only are we warranted, when regarding the text *generally* as a promise, to look for these gracious visitations to the church, but, from what the Lord *has* wrought and is working, we are encouraged to cherish the most lively anticipations, that still more *will* be wrought in our day! All things at present seem to be tending toward this great result,—the separation between truth and error,—the more complete drawing of the line of demarcation between the church and the world. In connection with this tendency of things, it is but for the Saviour’s honour to suppose that He will more and more beautify His people with His salvation, that they may bear more steadfast and consistent witness for Him in the world. In making these remarks, I do not specially allude to anything in our particular circumstances; but to the great general question, that throughout the so-called Christian world—not in one quarter



of the world, but throughout the whole—there is a mighty contest going on between the two kingdoms of light and darkness, somewhat similar to that which took place at the Reformation. In this contest the kingdom of light may seem externally to suffer, and to be overborne; but we have all experience on our side, when we say that the measure of spiritual prosperity will be increased in proportion to the measure of outward suffering. There have been in many parts of the world, in our own day, undeniable indications of religious revival. The world has only taken notice of one part of it, viz. the strong excitement which has been stirred up among alarmed and convicted sinners; it has not thought of the result to which this has led in cases innumerable, which will perhaps never be known till the great day of account,—cases where the alarm and conviction have terminated in conversion to God, in joy and peace in believing, and in all the fruits of righteousness. But those who feel an interest in Christ's cause have marked these things, and must see in them the commencement of such a work as is referred to in the text, when Christ shall come down upon the church as the rain upon the mown grass. And let me beseech you again, my friends, before we pass from this topic, to connect the words of the psalmist here, *as a promise*, with the solemn work in which we are so soon to be engaged, and to pray accordingly. The church is the garden of the Lord. On a communion Sabbath it is the garden, as it were, in blossom. What a fair appearance there is! but alas, how fallacious, unless the dews of grace are given, and the sun of righteousness shine to advance and to mature the fruit! Let us be much in prayer, taking our warrant from all the faithful promises of the word, that the Lord would water and beautify His garden, that fruit may be produced, to His own praise and glory.

III. In the third place, let us speak for a little of some of the means which must be employed for the obtaining of the blessings promised in the text.

It must never be forgotten that the Lord works sovereignly, and that in some instances it is impossible for us to trace the second causes, which bring about the most important results

in His church. For instance, if we were to say *absolutely* that *every* great revival of religion must be preceded by a prayerful and devoted attitude on the part of the church, we would find our reasoning utterly at fault, on looking at the state of the church previously to the Reformation. There *may* indeed have been then, as there were when religion was sunk to as low an ebb immediately before the coming of our Lord, some who longed and prayed for consolation to Israel ; but when we look at the state of things at the period of the Reformation, so far as authentic history places them before us, we cannot perceive any traces of a seeking after Christ, on the part of the church at large, to which that wonderful breaking out of the light of divine truth can be considered as furnishing an answer. The whole series of events in that age must be resolved into a display of the divine sovereignty. I speak not at present of the various providential arrangements by which *the world* was prepared, as it were, for that emancipation from spiritual thralldom which, through the instrumentality of the Reformers, it received,—for these were very striking ; but what is asserted is this, that it would be difficult to perceive in the state of the church at that time, utterly corrupted as it was, any connecting link between the darkness that prevailed before the rising of the Reformation and the light that so suddenly overspread the world afterwards. We must at once resolve the whole into absolute sovereignty. But still, what it is my object to impress upon you at present is this, that *generally* matters are arranged otherwise in the church, and that certain *means* are to be employed, in order to the effecting of any spiritual good upon a larger or a smaller scale.

1. Thus, *first*, when Christ is to come down for the refreshment of His people, like rain upon the mown grass, it will *generally* be found that they have been stirred up earnestly to desire and long for His manifestations. Thus it is when the people are represented as saying, ‘ Let us return to the Lord, and let us follow on to know the Lord,’ that He is described as having His going forth prepared like the morning, and as coming like the rain, ‘ like the former and latter rain unto the earth.’ And it is in connection with the earnest desire of

the psalmist, that he might see God's power and glory as he had seen them in the sanctuary, that his soul is said to be satisfied as with marrow and with fatness, so that his mouth praises Him with joyful lips.

2. *Again*, when Christ is to come down for the refreshment of His people, it will generally be found that they have been excited to the exercises of deep repentance and of prayer. When Israel takes words and turns to the Lord, saying to Him, 'Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: Asshur shall not save us; neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods,' the Lord makes answer, 'I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely; I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon.'

3. *Again*, when Christ is to come down for the refreshment of His people, it will generally be found that they have set themselves to walk before Him, according to all the appointments of His word. Thus the remarkable revivals of religion which took place during the reigns of Jehoshaphat and Hezekiah were connected with the efforts of these pious monarchs to have the church regulated according to the pattern which was shown to Moses on the mount: 'Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the Lord.' It is only when we hold fast the truth, and strive to have our footsteps ordered according to the word of God, that we can expect to be in the enjoyment of the light of His countenance. 'Wilt Thou not revive us again, that Thy people may rejoice in Thee?' asks the psalmist. And what is the answer? 'The Lord will speak peace to His people and to His saints; but let them not turn again to folly,'—implying that they had retraced their steps from the path of error, and were at that time striving to walk in the way which He had prescribed.

4. *Once more*, when Christ is to come down for the refreshment of His people, it will generally be found that they have been brought to give greater honour to the Spirit and His work than they were accustomed to do before, and to feel more deeply their absolute dependence upon His gracious operations.

It is said of the Israelites that they rebelled and vexed

the Holy Spirit of God ; therefore He was turned to be their enemy, and fought against them. Now we are warned against grieving or vexing the Holy Spirit of promise,—sins for the punishment of which He withdraws from a church, and leaves it with only a name to live, while it is dead. And so, on the other hand, when the Spirit is honoured, when His work is highly esteemed, when His presence is earnestly invited by His people, and when they are filled with all anxiety to follow up His motions and suggestions, then does He put forth His power in quickening the dead, enlightening the ignorant, strengthening the weak, and beautifying the church with His salvation.

Many other remarks might be made here, but the time forbids. Let me just, in conclusion, remind you, that as by certain means Christ's refreshing presence may be obtained by the church, so there are certain obstacles or hindrances to the obtaining of it. If we come with unbelieving and unprepared hearts to His holy ordinances,—if the ungodly and profane and impure thrust themselves forward to pollute our holy things, then our King is dishonoured, and the tokens of His favour must be withheld.

O brethren, let us search and try our ways ; let us stir ourselves up to pant for the manifestations of His love ; let us mourn over and repent of our past unfaithfulness ; let us be earnest in our prayers ; let us study strict conformity to His will ; and, above all, let us honour and seek for His Holy Spirit : then will His table afford us a rich repast, and He will come down to us as rain upon the mown grass, as showers that water the earth. Amen.

## XII.

### WAITING FOR GOD'S SALVATION.<sup>1</sup>

‘I have waited for Thy salvation, O Lord.’—GEN. XLIX. 18.

**I**N selecting this verse as the subject of our meditations at present, it may seem that I restrict myself to too narrow a view of the dying words of Jacob. But, apart from the consideration that it would be impossible to give anything like an intelligent exposition of his whole dying address, I think that, from the sentiment itself which is here expressed, and from the circumstances connected with the utterance of it, and from the practical application that may be made of it, it may be most profitably taken as the ground of our remarks on this occasion. It has been made a question, but we think very unnecessarily, why this ejaculation should have been inserted in this particular place. It must be confessed that it does form a kind of digression from the general subject. Jacob, as we see, had gathered his sons around him on his deathbed, to tell them what would befall them in the latter days; and after announcing, as the Spirit strengthened him, the destinies of seven of the families of Israel, he gives vent all at once to his own feelings in the words, ‘I have waited for Thy salvation, O Lord.’ It cannot be denied that these words destroy the continuity of the prophetic narrative. They come in most abruptly and unexpectedly. But we think, if ever the saying of the wise man was verified, that ‘a word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver,’ it is in the case before us. The deathbed of Jacob fills a larger space in the sacred history than that of any other of God’s saints, either in the Old Testament or the New. To him it was granted before he died, to declare very fully the divine pur-

<sup>1</sup> This is one of the first series of lectures on the Old Testament (21st July 1844).

poses respecting his descendants ; so much so, that on reading the narrative we almost forget that he whose words we read was so near the confines of eternity ! We seem to have the patriarch *prophesying* rather than the patriarch *dying* brought before us. Now in this view, and looking to Jacob as on his deathbed, there is, if we may so speak, an air of coldness and formality about the whole transaction, when we advert merely to the various predictions which the passage contains. And if we had had nothing recorded but these predictions, we would have felt some regret that we had not been informed more particularly of Jacob's personal feelings at this solemn time,—at the closing scene of his earthly pilgrimage. But the difficulty is fully met, and the regret removed by the text. Let me advert to this for a moment. While there is endless variety in the lives and experiences of the people of God in the season of health and strength, and endless variety also in their deathbed feelings and experience, there is in the one case, as well as in the other, a common ground on which they meet, and where they present some common points of resemblance. Thus every real follower of Christ is like Christ, and has, in greater or less measure, the same mind in him which was also in Christ Jesus. Differing from every other believer in gifts, graces, and attainments, each one can yet be identified as a member of the same family by his bearing the family likeness. And so with regard to deathbed feelings and experience. There is the utmost diversity in the peace and comfort with which the people of God face the last enemy, and the feelings with which they bid adieu to this earthly scene ; but still, in the midst of all this diversity there is a turning of the soul to the same objects, and a close and solemn dealing between the soul and God, whom it is about to meet. We would indeed regard it as most strange and unaccountable should any Christian, at that eventful time, when he is about to pass to the judgment-seat of God, be so occupied in addressing those around him as to give no indication of his own views and feelings with respect to eternal things. It would argue an insensibility to these momentous realities, which, to say the least, it would not be easy to explain. And therefore, as has been already stated, we would have felt as if there had

been something awanting if on Jacob's deathbed there had been only predictions uttered, and if no word had fallen from him by which we could see, as it were, into the state of his own soul, and the nature of his own experience and his own prospects. Now this want is completely made up by the short sentence which forms the text. He had prophesied, as the Spirit taught him, what would be the general character and fortunes of so many of his descendants in their respective tribes. All at once, however, we can conceive his strength failed him, and he leaned back upon his couch to breathe for a moment, in the midst of the disclosures which were thus so thickly crowded upon his view. Thus pausing and meditating, he looked upward with the delightful feeling that the time of his own complete redemption was at hand, and uttered the beautiful sentiment, 'I have waited for Thy salvation, O Lord.' There is more of the habitual frame of Jacob's mind unfolded to us in these few words than volumes could well express, and they are very instructive. They teach us, first, what was the nature of that inheritance which the patriarchs regarded as made good to them by the divine promises; they show us next what had been the great characteristic of Jacob's life from the time that he was first brought under the power of divine grace; and they also prove most fully the truth elsewhere stated, that the righteous hath hope in his death.

We shall advert for a little to these points, and then we shall briefly consider the text in its more general application to ourselves.

I have said, then, that from these few words we may learn, first, what was the nature of that inheritance which the patriarchs regarded as bequeathed to them by the divine promises.

Those who take only a narrow and literal view of the transactions between God and His people under the patriarchal dispensation, see nothing more promised in the covenant made with Abraham than the land of Canaan, and some few temporal blessings besides. But such passages as the text rebuke their low conceptions, and place the subject in its proper light. We are not obliged to have recourse to the discoveries which are made in the New Testament, in order to

be assured that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the believers who came after them, were animated by higher hopes than any worldly possession could have kindled up within them, while they sojourned here below. The Old Testament very plainly bears the same testimony *here*, as in other respects, with the New. 'These all,' says the apostle, speaking of the spiritual seed of Abraham, 'died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off; and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.' And what other language does Jacob speak in the text, when at the close of his pilgrimage, and *then* especially, he feels himself brought nigh to the salvation of the Lord! His words mean that now *that* was at hand which hitherto he had only desiered in the distance,—that now he was to be put in possession of what before had been, as it were, remote. If Canaan had been the inheritance he looked for, death would have stripped him of his hope. It must therefore have been spiritual and eternal blessings, more especially, which he considered as secured to him by the divine promise,—salvation in the full sense of the word,—deliverance from guilt and from sin, and admission to the immediate presence of God. And here, my friends, I cannot help remarking that it would be well for us all—for the church at large, and for every individual—if the same exalted views were now taken of God's promises as this holy man was enabled to take, and if the followers of Christ would live more among the promises, and feed upon them by faith. Among the various arguments which we are warranted to employ for the purpose of drawing men to Christ, this is one, that even in the present life Christ's followers have more real enjoyment, more solid satisfaction, more actual happiness, than those who love the pleasures of sin, which are but for a season. And among the many good things which God has promised to His people, we find the life that *now is* enumerated. Salvation is partly a present benefit. Therefore the argument is good, and the promise is true. But there is something in the text better than both. It is in the future that the children of God are taught to look for their full inheritance, their full salvation. They



must take much on trust in the present life; their *complete* redemption is hereafter, and it is infallibly secured. How willingly, therefore, may those who have the hopes of God's word to cheer them, submit to the crosses and disappointments which lie in the way to the full realizing of these hopes! Even if they had no such comforts and enjoyments in the meantime as do ever accompany the believing acceptance of Christ, and a sincere devotion of heart and life to the service of God,—if there were nothing in the present state but *unmitigated* trial and suffering for them,—still, with Jesus now as their Saviour, and with the certainty of enjoying what is laid up for them beyond the grave, they might well be satisfied with their lot. And they would assuredly be more completely satisfied, and would endure with more unshrinking fortitude their present difficulties, if they did but accustom themselves to look with steadier eye to the glory that is to be revealed. If one had to cross a wide and deep abyss upon a narrow plank, he would not look down into the yawning gulf from his giddy elevation, else undoubtedly he would be lost; but, keeping his eye fixed on the landing-place upon the other side, he would pass along securely and arrive in safety. And so, if the followers of Christ would look habitually beyond the present scene of trouble to the rest which remaineth for the people of God, they would be enabled to maintain composure and serenity amid the afflictions and tribulations of the world. Jacob waited for the salvation of the Lord made good to him by the promise; and thus he was contented to be a pilgrim and sojourner upon earth, and to die at a distance from the land of Canaan.

But, again, I have said that from the brief ejaculation in the text we may learn what had been the great characteristic of Jacob's life from the time that he was first brought under the power of divine grace.

His affections had been set upon the things above. His chief interest had lain in eternity. His whole habit and frame of mind had been moulded according to the high expectations which he had been led to cherish. All this is manifestly implied in the expression, 'I have waited for Thy salvation, O Lord.' There are many people—too many even of those

who make a profession of religion—by whom eternal things are never seriously contemplated, until the near approach of death compels them to awaken from their indifference, and to bethink themselves of what cometh after death. Then all is dark and dim and vague in their prospects, on the one hand ; or, on the other, the more clearly they realize what is to be, the more terrible futurity appears. But in the case of the patriarch it was not so. His mind had been familiarized to sacred meditation. The promises of God had furnished food to his soul, amid all the changes of his eventful life. His intercourse with the unseen world had been kept up habitually ; and so the nearer he came to death, the nearer he felt he came to blessedness. Long he had been the pilgrim ; but now he is within sight of home. What he had waited for was now within his grasp. He was now like Simeon when he took the infant Jesus in his arms and said, ‘Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word ; for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation.’ And does not all this exhibit to us in a very satisfying light the superiority of the believer to the mere man of the world ? To any one who could only trace the movements of Jacob in so far as they were manifested to the world, his life must have presented at least as much vicissitude, and as many of the ordinary cares and disquietudes of the peculiar station he occupied, as that of any of those around him who were strangers to the knowledge of the true God. But when we look into his secret history, through the medium of the text, how different is the whole aspect it assumes ! True, he seemed to be as much busied in the management of his flocks and herds, and had as many domestic interests—and these sometimes sufficiently perplexing—to engross his thoughts, as the head of any other patriarchal establishment. And when he walked into the fields, as his father Isaac used to do at eventide, to meditate, a man who knew not the secret habit and tendency of his soul might have imagined that he had just gone forth to inspect his property, and to be satisfied of the watchfulness and fidelity of his herdsmen,—whereas he had gone forth to meditate upon the works of God and the promises of God, and to turn his thoughts to that great salvation for which he waited, and

which was to form his eternal inheritance. He had the hope of that as an anchor to his soul, when tossed by worldly cares. He had within himself, as brought nigh to him and realized by faith, an unfailing source of comfort and enjoyment in the anticipation of the good things contained in the promises. He could draw largely from that source, and transact closely with God, when a mere onlooker knew nothing of the matter. The soul which on the deathbed took advantage of a single moment's quietude to breathe out the prayer in the text, must have had much and intimate communion with the Lord beforehand in the exercise of waiting for His salvation. Jacob, while in the world, and immersed in all its usual cares and occupations, must have lived much above it, and must have derived his chief happiness elsewhere than from the world; and they give additional significance to his deathbed experience, as expressed in the words that he had waited for the salvation of the Lord. Now in this consideration there is an important principle involved, which I cannot forbear referring to. It is very commonly supposed, and sometimes even urged in the way of defence for a neglect of the claims of the gospel upon a man's *immediate* regard, that although those whose time is wholly at their own disposal may follow out all the requirements of a religious life, yet it is utterly impossible for such as are incessantly perplexed and harassed with worldly cares to devote themselves to the concerns of religion. They allege that these must be let alone until they have more command of their own time and their own movements. In opposition, then, to such views, we say, that so far from there being any inconsistency between a religious life and what in common language may be called a business life, we do not know how the latter can be at all endurable apart from the former. We can conceive how the man who is engaged in worldly business, yea, and vexed and annoyed by its innumerable difficulties, can find an outlet from all *that* in the exercises and meditations to which God's word calls him; but how any man can get a happy and comfortable through-bearing without religion, appears to us as almost an impossibility. And if those who are much troubled by the cares inseparable from the active occupations of life knew their own mercies, they would, above

all things, seek an interest in the Saviour, and keep firm hold of the salvation of the Lord; and then they would have, as it were, a refuge,—a sanctuary to which they might betake themselves when perplexed by worldly difficulties, and in which they would find rest and comfort for their souls, in the midst of the most pressing outward ills.

But *once more*, the language of Jacob in the text proves most fully the truth elsewhere stated, that ‘the righteous hath hope in his death.’

Nothing could have been more peaceful and tranquil than the departure of the patriarch. He knew whither he was going; he knew into what society he was to be introduced; and he was raised above all fears and misgivings. It would not indeed have formed of itself any evidence of his being in an unprepared and unsafe state had he exhibited less composure on his deathbed, and been less able to look with confidence into the future. For even some of the holiest of men have been so overpowered at the prospect of meeting God, that their sun may be said to have set under a cloud. But still, in accordance with the rule which generally holds good, we say that if Jacob had not *lived* under the power of the world to come, he would not have died with such comfortable assurance that he was about to experience in its full measure the salvation of the Lord. Yet withal, if we would know on what ground his tranquillity and comfort of mind at that trying season chiefly rested, we must look beyond his previous life and beyond himself, to understand this fully. And nowhere could it be more clearly pointed out to us than in his dying ejaculation: ‘I have waited for *Thy* salvation, *O Lord*.’ We do not see on the first reading of these few words the depth of meaning which they indicate. Yet a moment’s attentive glance at them will enable us to perceive the ground on which Jacob’s hope was founded, and the secret of his remarkable composure. You will observe that he describes the salvation for which he waited as the salvation of God. ‘*Thy salvation*’ he calls it. If he had allowed any such feeling as *this* to influence him, that he himself had lived in such a way as that the salvation could not be withheld from him, then we hesitate not to say that he would not have enjoyed so much comfort in the

closing scene of his life as he evidently did enjoy. But he looked to the Angel of the Covenant as the author and finisher of his faith, and thus he was satisfied as to the certainty of the salvation which awaited him. He saw the whole to be of free grace,—the Lord's work and the Lord's gift,—and hence the confidence which he manifested. 'Thy salvation, O Lord,' he could say; and upon that ground he could go into eternity without fear. My friends, if those among us who are seriously impressed with a sense of the importance of things spiritual and eternal would just look simply and steadily, as Jacob did, to the Lord as the *giver* of salvation, and would endeavour to enter into the experience of Job, 'Though He slay me I will trust Him,'—in other words, if they would cease from themselves, and place their whole confidence in Christ, they would have just such comfort as Jacob had. Religious disquietude may be safely connected in almost every case with the setting up of the creature in the place of the Creator; with a cleaving to the law, in some way or other, instead of a relying upon the free grace of the gospel. During life, as well as upon the deathbed, this holds good. If there is firm faith in Christ, there is also peace. The righteous hath hope in his death, not because of his own righteousness, but because of the righteousness of Christ, in which he trusts. The words 'Thy salvation, O Lord,' will carry a man through any difficulty. But there can be no *real peace* at the close of life unless the soul can claim Christ as its portion. Jacob's descent from Abraham would not have armed him against the fear of death. His own walk with God would not have made his passage through the dark valley clear to him. But when he could say, 'I have waited for Thy salvation, O Lord,' then we are not astonished at his composure and his good hope. And every believer may have the same hope and the same fortitude if he will only rely with an implicit faith upon the all-sufficiency of the same Saviour. If we commit our cause to the sympathizing, gracious, and all-prevailing Advocate at the right hand of God, and look to Him, and trust in Him exclusively, then the result is certain. Even death itself will not terrify.

But now, having considered the passage before us with more especial reference to him by whom the words were

uttered, I would very briefly make a general application of it to our own circumstances.

And in so doing, it may be well to mention in the outset, that although it is presented to us in the sacred narrative as a sentiment expressed upon the deathbed by a very aged man, it is not for this reason to be set aside by us as only suitable for a deathbed, and for a very aged man. The language, it must be acknowledged, is peculiarly adapted to such a time and such circumstances as are indicated by the context. It is altogether in keeping with Jacob's age and with his piety. But then it must not be supposed to contain a sentiment which none but a patriarch just ready to sink into the grave could properly cherish. Let me urge this point. The saying is beautiful, dropping as it did from the lips of a man of God who had reached an age far beyond what is now accounted the extremity of human life: 'I have waited for Thy salvation, O Lord.' Jacob *had literally waited* long for the salvation of the Lord. And in his case there is peculiar significance in the language he employs. But let it not be imagined that the young and vigorous, merely because of their youth and vigour, have nothing to do with such language. Let not any who belong to the one or the other of these classes suppose that because an old dying man here speaks, *they* have no interest in what he says. The words of the text are just as appropriate to a follower of Christ at any age as they were to the patriarch when he had lived 147 years. From the very moment of conversion, every believer may be described as one who waits for the salvation of the Lord. Looking, then, at these words as descriptive of the frame of mind and sentiments of the people of God generally, we would found upon them one or two questions, as more likely to make them practically useful than any general dissertation.

1. And, in the first place, I would ask, Do you know what is meant by the salvation of the Lord?

It is necessary that we have a common understanding as to this matter, else we have met together at this time in vain. Now I would say, it is not a quiet life, it is not the enjoyment of a good reputation, it is not a participation in the

means of grace, it is not a peaceful death, that constitutes the salvation spoken of. You may say, Why specify these particulars? Who would imagine that these things constitute salvation? My friends, many people do imagine this. If a man live quietly, stand well in the estimation of his fellow-creatures, wait upon the means of grace, and die peacefully, it is supposed that all is right with him. But do *you* think that all this may be, and yet that there may be no salvation? Then the more important is the question we have proposed: Do you know what is meant by the salvation of the Lord? These two important privileges are included in it: deliverance from wrath, and conformity to the image of the Son of God. The first lies at the commencement of the life of faith; the other forms the very substance of that life. To every one who is in Christ Jesus there is no condemnation; and every one who seeks for glory, honour, and immortality—being freed from condemnation—aims, with the Spirit's help, at the attainment of the likeness of Christ. This *latter* privilege is *peculiarly characteristic of salvation taken by every believer*. It is an inestimable blessing to have peace with God, but it is a higher blessing to bear the image of God. The perfecting of that image in the soul is salvation; and once more, therefore, we may ask, Do you know experimentally what is meant by the salvation of the Lord?

2. Secondly, I would ask, Do you know what is meant by *waiting* for salvation, *i.e.* ardently but patiently looking forward to it? It does not form a question as to time or age, but it holds good universally that believers wait for the Lord. 'We that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened,' the apostle says. There is vast significance in these words, and the meaning of them comes to be more forcibly felt when they are placed side by side with such a passage as the text. 'We that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened,' is the experience of Paul. And what else does Jacob mean when he says, 'I have waited for Thy salvation, O Lord?' The apostle would fain have been disencumbered of the body of sin and death,—he groaned under the weight of it; and the patriarch was of the same mind when he employed the language before us. Both felt the burden of present evil; both sighed ar-

dently for better things to come. Our question then is, Does your experience coincide with theirs? No man has been a Christian, even for a day, who does not feel that he has much to cast aside and leave behind him as unfit to be carried into eternity. No man has ever felt the preciousness of Christ who does not desire to be conformed to the likeness of Christ. Now it is this casting aside, and aiming at conformity to the likeness of Christ, that we are to understand as constituting, in one view at least, the substance of the sentiment expressed in the text. If we cherish no habitual desire to be freed from the dominion of sin, and no habitual endeavour to be holy as Christ is holy, we have no community of feeling with him who said, 'I have waited for Thy salvation, O Lord.'

But let me specially notice here, that believers in Christ, as waiting for salvation, groaning under the weight of sin, and seeking to be set free, must not suffer themselves to become impatient, and to long too earnestly for the promised rest. The soldiers of Jesus Christ must not seek to lay aside their armour and to run away from the conflict until the victory is fairly won. You will sometimes hear the aged—especially when they are overtaken by sickness which prevents all active exertion—speaking as if they were of no use in this world, and as if it would be well were they dismissed from all their warfare. But, my friends, they do not speak advisedly when they express such feelings. It is no doubt for this, among other reasons, that the Saviour keeps them where they are, that He may show forth the power of His grace in sustaining them under the burden of age, the pressure of disease, and all their other present trials. And they glorify Him, they set an example of encouragement to those around them, they give practical testimony to their sense of His loving-kindness, when, with faith and patience combined, they wait cheerfully for the full salvation of the Lord. If they were altogether fitted for it, they would not be kept struggling here. But there is yet some sin to be subdued; there is deeper submission to God's will to be exhibited; there is yet more evidence to be given by them of the experienced faithfulness of the Saviour; and therefore they must wait. And is it not good to wait for the salvation of the Lord?



3. In the third place, I would ask, Do you know what is meant by *preparing* while you wait for the salvation of the Lord?

It is not enough that we speculate and discourse of this great matter. If our heart is in it we must prepare for it. There *is* such a thing as eternal salvation. It is enjoyed at this moment by multitudes who were once as far from it as any of us can be. He who uttered the words before us now realizes *in full* what in this world he waited for.

But let none imagine that the eternal life which is the summit of the believer's desire is reached without ardent desire and due preparation. You know what efforts a man will make to gain a situation which promises him respectability and wealth and influence in the world. You know how he will concentrate all his energies to gain it. You know how he will study night and day to obtain the qualifications necessary for the discharge of the duties connected with it. Shall eternity, then, be less valued than time? Let no man say that he waits for the salvation of the Lord, whose heart is not in the matter, who seeks not through the Spirit's grace to mortify the deeds of the body, and who is not gradually attaining more and more of the temper and spirit that will fit him for the society of the redeemed. 'I have waited for Thy salvation, O Lord.' What a rebuke to the worldling! He waits for the issue of his schemes and purposes; and when the issue comes, it leaves him in disappointment. He *waits* till death comes, and then he is dragged away from all he waited for.

'I have waited for Thy salvation, O Lord.' How encouraging these words to the people of God! In the case of Jacob, here is the time of waiting at length finished, and the thing waited for fully obtained. 'Wait ye on,' believers. In other things ye may be deceived, but here ye cannot. 'He that endureth to the end shall be saved.' 'They shall never perish, neither shall any one pluck them out of my hand.' 'It is good for a man to hope, and patiently to wait for the salvation of God.' But be persevering as well as patient. And strive habitually to be ready; for at such an hour as ye think not the Son of man may come.

There is one remark now which I would offer in conclusion, and would leave with you. In the remarks which have been made, it will not be supposed that the salvation of the Lord only comes to the believer when death comes. It is then, indeed, consummated ; but there is a precious earnest or commencement of it in the present life. There is a *right* to all the blessings of the new covenant obtained by faith in Christ. There is the right of sonship obtained through union to Him who is the beloved of the Father. There is the indwelling of the Spirit in consequence of sonship. These blessings, together with others, such as peace with God, and grace to help infirmities, make salvation a present blessing. And it is only those who enjoy these first-fruits that can be said to wait for the full and glorious harvest. We are deceiving ourselves fearfully and ruinously, if we imagine that when the end of life draws near, when the dark shadows of the grave are closing in upon us, we shall be in time to think of salvation, and really to appropriate it. It is as foolish to imagine this, as it would be to expect that, lying idle in bed all the day, we should in the evening be at the end of a journey, which should have been begun in the morning. Oh, my friends, be not thus deceived by Satan's wiles. Salvation is in part a *present* blessing, and must be experienced as a present blessing. Christ must be yours *now* as your deliverer from wrath and sin, if He is to be yours for ever as the object of endless enjoyment. Amen.

### XIII.

#### GOOD TIDINGS TO THE POOR AND BROKENHEARTED.

‘I am the Lord that healeth thee.’—Exod. xv. 26.

WHAT a precious declaration have we here, my brethren, and how suitable to our condition and necessities as fallen creatures! The word of God informs us, our own experience confirms it, and a survey of the actual condition of the human race bears evidence to the same effect, that the world in which we live can be compared to nothing else than one vast spiritual lazaret-house, wherein mortal disease reigns in innumerable forms, and man himself is utterly incapable of devising or applying any remedy. ‘The Lord looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand and seek God. They are all gone aside; they are all together become filthy; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.’ Such is the divine testimony as to the *state* of fallen man, who is elsewhere declared to be as helpless as these words represent him to be vile and polluted. The disease, of which he is the victim, rages with fell virulence throughout his whole frame; for ‘the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint, and from the crown of the head to the sole of the foot there is no soundness;’ and withal he lies utterly powerless under it, for the Scripture describes him as wholly *without strength* in himself, and declares that no man can redeem his brother, or give to God a ransom for him. When burning fever has done its work, leaving the poor sufferer bereft of every energy, so that he cannot turn himself upon his couch, or raise his hand to his mouth to moisten his parched tongue, it presents us with something like an emblem of the spiritual condition of man, with his understanding darkened, his heart the seat of im-

purity, and his will perverted through sin reigning in him, and the power of Satan binding him and keeping him prostrate. But is he so helpless, then, it may be asked, as these remarks would seem to imply? Is there no exaggeration in such descriptions of the state to which he has been reduced by the fall? Can he do nothing for himself? Can he not at least pray? Yes, he can pray. The Apostle Peter commanded the man who wished to purchase the Holy Ghost with money—and who was in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity—to pray God if perhaps the thought of his heart might be forgiven him. Every man can pray; and every man is bound to pray. But does not the very fact of his bowing at the footstool of God, and casting himself upon the mercy of God, and deprecating <sup>very</sup> deserved wrath, form the most striking proof <sup>of</sup> <sup>very</sup> helplessness which the carnal mind is so unwilling to admit? Look to this matter, brethren, a little more closely for a moment, as it contributes to illustrate the subject we are at present handling: man's condition diseased, and powerless under that disease. What is as <sup>dis</sup> but the cry for help? Does it furnish you with any price to obtain aid; does it invest you with any worth or merit, on the ground of which you can expect that God will show you favour; does it form a price with which you can purchase a cure for your spiritual disease, that you have a voice to cry out for deliverance? When the suppliant asks for alms, he only tells how needy he is. He would not ask if he did not need. And so prayer is the expression of man's helplessness; not an evidence of his ability to raise himself from the pollution and misery in which he is involved. Oh, my friends, we need much to have this view of the subject often placed before us. There is scarcely a more prevalent notion among men than that prayer is a meritorious exercise; and that he who performs it habitually, and more especially he who abounds in it in a time of sickness, or on the deathbed, is making straight for heaven. But let us repel all such notions, as having their origin in that self-righteousness which is one of the most fearful symptoms of man's spiritual malady. Prayer is indeed the breath of the regenerated soul. And no one can be on the way to heaven, who is not often at the

mercy-seat. But the very circumstance which renders it indispensable is just this, that man can do nothing for himself, enfeebled and defiled as he is by sin, and that he must cast himself upon God for everything he needs. We might show in like manner with respect to other things which are enjoined as duties, such as the reading of God's word, and the observance of His ordinances, which unconverted men can perform outwardly as well as those who have been born again by the Spirit, that the performance of them furnishes no proof that man has any power to shake off the deadly distemper under which he labours, or to make out for himself any title to the enjoyment of spiritual health and life eternal. But enough has been said in the way of dry detail upon this subject of overwhelming interest. Let us endeavour for an instant to fasten our thoughts down to the terrible reality, that man, or, what comes home to us yet more closely, each one of us who has not been converted by divine grace is a sinner, and therefore the victims of disease, in the sight of God, beyond all description loathsome, and utterly incurable by any skill or effort of our own. Little indeed are the majority of men affected by this solemn truth; and even when it is felt, how lightly does it press upon them compared with what it ought to do! The terms in which it is conveyed are so familiar to our ears, that they fail to make a due impression upon our hearts. When we are told that the disease which cleaves to us is sin, when we are addressed in the terms 'you are a sinner,' we acquiesce in the statement, but we are not alarmed by it. But what is meant by our being sinners, of which so much is spoken, and the mention of which yet produces so little impression on us? My friends, yet if we would but reflect upon it, and lay it to heart, this fact would make the stoutest among us tremble; it would rob us of our rest; it would dry up every source of comfort within us. To be a sinner (I speak, of course, of those who are still unpardoned and unreconciled to God) is to be in hostility and rebellion against the holy God; so that if the sinner had all his will, and were armed with the power, he would dethrone Jehovah. Is this language too strong? Alas, it is not. When men in the headlong career of sin fret against the requirements of the

law of God, and trample them under their feet, they show too clearly what is their feeling toward the Lawgiver. *To be a sinner*—that is to be unpardoned and unreconciled to God—is to be *unfit either for the society* of God, or for the society of angels and the redeemed who dwell with Him. You think of heaven; you dream of the rest that remaineth for the people of God; but into *that* rest there can enter nothing that defileth. Are *your* desires, your tastes, your pursuits, such as would harmonize with theirs? Could you tell God the things which at present lie nearest to your hearts, believing that He would take an interest in them? Could you expect to meet with any sympathy from God's angels, and from His glorified saints? Conscience says, No; and the word of God says that there is a great gulf fixed between those that are of the earth earthy and those that are conformed to the image of His Son. Again, to be a sinner is to lie under the wrath of God with all its tremendous consequences. Who can dwell with the devouring fire? Who can dwell with everlasting burnings? But this is the fruit of sin; this its rightful and certain issue. And should it not be so? Should not the creature that lives in rebellion against the holy and just government of Jehovah,—the creature whose powers are employed in constant opposition to Jehovah's will, be made a monument of vengeance? *Impenitent* sinner, thou art an atheist. If thou didst believe in God, thou couldst not from day to day trample as thou dost upon the plain precepts of His word. Thou art beyond expression daring and presumptuous, for thou wagest war against the Omnipotent. Thou art guilty of the blackest ingratitude; for He clothes thee, and feeds thee, and loads thee with blessings, and yet thou wilt not have Him as thy God. Thou art blind and miserable and naked, and thou thinkest thyself in want of nothing. Thou art under sentence of death; thou art perishing; thou liest before God all diseased and powerless, and deserving of His vengeance. Thy friends who have been the partners of thy guilt and folly cannot help thee. Those who have encouraged thee in thy mad career are more ready to laugh at thy calamity than to give thee counsel in the time of need. Thy fate seems to be hopeless. The heaven over thee is dark. The

grave to which thou art hastening is darker still, and beyond it are the regions of eternal darkness. What canst thou do, O sinner? Wretched child of pollution and of wrath, where wilt thou find a remedy for thy distress, and balsam for thy wounds? Oh, if thou wilt hear His voice, and harden not thy heart, there is yet mercy and recovery for thee; for this is the message which He has charged us to deliver; this is the name whereby He will be known: 'I am the Lord that healeth thee.' My friends, is not this announcement unspeakably precious? Is it not most suitable to our condition? Are we not as a congregation, with some among us in utter unbelief; some doubting; some fearful; some discouraged; and but few inclined to follow the Lord fully; just like the host of Israel, when it lay under the assault of the fiery serpents in the wilderness, diseased and helpless? And as Israel rejoiced when the brazen serpent was lifted up,—to which whosoever looked was healed,—should we not hail with joy the description which God gives us of Himself in the text, as the Lord who healeth us? And, brethren, even if we were compelled to acknowledge that we could only find a similitude corresponding to our state in the prophet's vision of the dry bones in the valley,—if we saw nothing about us but the symptoms of spiritual *death*, we would desire no other words than those which the text furnishes, to prophesy to the dry bones, 'I am the Lord that healeth thee.' The subject founded upon these words evidently *ought* to be one of comfort, and not of terror. And in what remains to be said, I would desire, with the blessing of the Spirit, so to apply it. To speak of the Lord that healeth, is to preach good tidings to the poor and brokenhearted, deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind. May the great Healer be present with us!

There are many topics suggested for our consideration by the text. The following may be mentioned, although the time will not permit me to do more than glance at some of them. First, I would speak of the Healer Himself; secondly, of His medicines; thirdly, of their efficacy; fourthly, of the way in which they are applied; and finally, of the danger which hangs over all those who reject them.

I. In the first place, then, let us meditate for a little upon the Healer Himself. This is none other than the Son of God ; Immanuel, God in our nature : He who appeared to Abraham, who spoke to Moses from the bush, and who led Israel through the wilderness to Canaan. He beheld the race of men plunged into guilt and wretchedness by their own voluntary act, lying at the mercy of the apostate spirit, who had been the instrument of their ruin, stripped of all that constituted their glory and their beauty. He beheld them destroyed by a disease whose ravages no human arm could arrest, and no human skill remove. The curse of the Eternal lay heavy upon them, and justice demanded their destruction. But electing love came in for the deliverance from among them of a multitude beyond all reckoning, whose salvation should be eternally to the glory of the riches of God's grace ; and to effect their deliverance, yet so as that divine justice should therein be magnified, the Son of God, the Healer, offered Himself ! With a compassion and a love that could only have dwelt in the bosom of the Deity, He bound Himself to give complete satisfaction, both by acting and by suffering, for those that were to be delivered ; so that, without any to challenge the efficacy of the work, all their iniquities should be forgiven, all their diseases healed, and all the privileges restored to them which, by their transgression, they had forfeited. But it was requisite that the great Physician should come down to the place where the sufferers and the dying were. Often had there been messengers despatched from heaven to earth before, sometimes on errands of judgment, and sometimes for purposes of mercy ; but never was there such an embassy as that on which the Son of God was sent, when He came forth to be the Healer of His people. That He might reach them in their helplessness, He appeared among them in fashion as a man, yea, a man of sorrows ; that He might raise them up from their miserable estate, the glory of the Godhead was concealed under human flesh ; and He, who made the world, was contented, while He lived in it, with the humble name of the *Man* Christ Jesus. Yet to the believing eye how attractive the *person*, to the believing heart how dear the *name*, of the *Man* Christ Jesus ! Our Creator, and yet our kinsman ; our Lord, and yet our



brother ; infinitely separated from all imperfection Himself, and yet touched with the feeling of our infirmities ; able to save to the uttermost, because He is the Mighty God ; the Saviour I need, because He has a human hand wherewith to take hold of me, and almighty power to lift me out of the corruption in which I wallow, and to carry me in triumph to heaven ! But although it is delightful to dwell upon these topics, at once elevating and comforting to the soul, it is for a more special and a practical purpose that I have marked this *first* as the subject of our present meditations, *Christ the Healer*. My brethren, I ask you to contemplate the person of the Saviour as God manifest in the flesh ; thus coming near to you that you may feel that, in order to be healed, you must go *directly* to Himself. Our Physician performs His cures through no creature-substitute. Often do we find those who are visited with deep convictions, *i.e.* who are really compelled to feel that they are diseased, seeking to interest in their behalf some others whose voice they think will avail at the mercy-seat. They would have them become their mediators, as it were, with the great Physician, because they are not worthy themselves. And how many are there of another class, who traffic, if we may so speak, in ordinances ; and seek the remedy for their spiritual disease in those things which have only been set up to lead the soul to Christ, but certainly not to occupy the place of Christ, or to perform the work of Christ ! Now, what we would have you to perceive and feel is, that you must have immediate and personal dealing with the Lord Jesus yourselves if you would be saved by Him. There is no need of a mediator between Him and you : He is the great Mediator Himself. You have but to go to the door and knock. There is written above it, 'It shall be opened.' No other can state to the Physician your disease, the plagues of your heart, your wants, your weaknesses, as you *can* yourselves. To rest in ordinances is to stop in the way that leads to Christ, and after all to perish, because you have not reached Him. Take instruction from the case of the poor woman, who, after labouring for many years under painful disease, when she heard that Christ was near, resolved at once to go and touch Him that she might be healed. She might have

communicated her wish to some of those who usually accompanied Him, and requested them to make intercession for her. Would not that have been better and easier than to press through the crowd by which the Saviour was surrounded for the purpose of reaching Himself? No; she did not think so. She *must touch* Christ. And accordingly she forced her way, touched Him, and was healed. And so we say to you, brethren, make application to the great Healer yourselves. The interest you have at stake is too important to be committed to any intermediate party. Take encouragement and go directly to the Redeemer in your own behalf. We do not read that any who ever went to Him were cast out. He has commissioned us to tell you that He is waiting to be gracious. Make straight to Him: trust not the prayers of others; present your own. The psalmist has furnished you with the words to use: 'O Lord, be merciful unto me; heal my soul, for I have sinned against Thee.' Remember that you can only fail if you put your case into any hand but that of the Physician Himself. If you commit it to Him, you cannot fail. You may be sadly borne down by the feeling of your own unworthiness. You may have many doubts. You may think your past ingratitude so great as to make it impossible you should be received. But still we say, Go to Christ Himself, and go in your own behalf. If He will not listen *to* you, when, with all humility, and at the same time with all earnestness, you implore the application of His power to heal, we know not to whom He will listen *for* you. These remarks, however, are not made to undervalue the request of one friend to another, 'Pray for me;' or to close up any of those secret channels of communication through which Christ's people send their intercessions to the mercy-seat for such as believe not. There were many healed by Jesus who were carried to Him by others. There are many still healed by Him who *plainly* seek not after Him themselves, in answer to the prayer of others; but yet, ere the cure is wrought, they are driven to the Physician for themselves. And what we wish to urge upon you is the folly of trusting to other persons or to other things, when you can at once reach Christ Himself. Go to Him. His human nature is the pledge that He will not

receive you with unkindness, as His divine nature is the evidence that He *can* bestow upon you what you need. ‘Come unto me,’ He says, ‘and ye shall find rest unto your souls. I am the Lord that healeth thee.’ A stronger argument than that we cannot offer.

II. But now, in the second place, I would speak to you of the medicines which are used by the great Physician.

These are just two—called in the figurative language of the Scripture, blood and water. We read in the Gospel according to John, that when our Lord was crucified, one of the soldiers with a spear pierced His side, and ‘forthwith there came out blood and water.’ And in the first Epistle of John we have the same statement reiterated: ‘This is He that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ; not by water only, but by water and blood.’ In both these passages the reference is to the two grand effects produced by the mediation of Christ, viz. atonement and purification. The blood points to the atonement or satisfaction which the Redeemer offered, whereby those who believe in Him are delivered from the punishment due to their sins, and restored to the divine favour; and the water points to the glorious transformation which is wrought in the believer through the power of sanctifying grace. The apostle, in the Epistle to the Hebrews, brings the two blessings together in the brief but comprehensive statement, that Christ dispenses mercy to pardon, and grace to help; not the mercy without the grace, nor the grace without the mercy, but both together. The act of pardoning mercy introduces the believer in whose favour it is passed into the family of God; and thus there is secured for him a right to the enjoyment of all the privileges which flow from the infinite fulness of His Father’s love. Now observe how completely the medicines which Christ has provided for the healing of His people are adapted to the spiritual malady under which they labour. This malady is indeed exceedingly complicated; but still the remedies are fitted to meet every form it can assume. *First*, the soul groans under the burden of guilt, by which it is every moment exposed to everlasting torment. Well, the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all

sin ; and herein lies its wondrous virtue so to cleanse, that it is the blood of the eternal Son of God. There is something in the history of this medicine that is most remarkable. Nothing else than blood could cleanse the guilty soul ; for God had written it, ‘ Without shedding of blood there is no remission.’ But no blood could be found in heaven to shed and make atonement for man’s transgression. And so, that He might find the necessary medicine, the great Physician travelled even to this world for it, and became a partaker of flesh and blood. And thus He had that to give which was necessary to procure the remission of sin ; and when His blood was shed,—that is, when He expired,—the removal of His people’s guilt was eternally secured. But *guilt* is not the only malady of the soul. It has other diseases for which grace is the remedy. It is *blind*, as well as guilty. Well, for the cure of its blindness there is enlightening grace. The Lord who commanded the light to shine out of darkness shines into the heart, giving the light of the knowledge of His glory in the face of Jesus Christ. Further, the soul is weakened and impaired in all its powers, as well as blind. It cannot resist evil ; it cannot contend against the wicked one ; it cannot overcome the world. But for this its weakness there is provided such supply of strengthening grace, that the believer can say, ‘ I can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me.’ It is altogether corrupt and defiled, but there is grace to purify. It is often beyond measure troubled and distressed, but there is grace to comfort. And the history of this grace is not less remarkable than the history of the blood. It is enjoyed through the indwelling of God the Spirit in the believer. Wonderful to tell, the Holy One takes up His residence in those whose guilt the atoning blood has washed away. ‘ The Lord hath removed His tabernacle from on high, and pitched it among men ; He dwells in them and walks in them ; He makes them His people, and becomes their God.’ Now then, brethren, we ask, What think ye of the medicines,—the blood that cleanses from guilt, and the grace that cleanses from pollution, and imparts all needful strength and comfort to the wounded and troubled soul ? Alas, they are but little prized by the majority of men, and sought after but by few. There

are some who laugh at the doctrine that the blood of Christ should heal the soul, and who treat it as an idle fancy. There are many who *will* not be healed by Christ's medicines, and are lost while they speculate and wonder how these should be effective. And many there are who, while they feel the pangs of the disease, yet will persist in trying other remedies, or at least will not avail themselves of those which Christ offers. Do I not at this moment address some of this last class now present? My friends, there are some of you who feel the pangs of the disease so keenly and so intensely on some occasions, that you are driven hither and thither like the bark tossed by the storm, and can find neither peace nor rest. Yes, even when you have everything around you that is usually supposed to minister to comfort, and to drive care and anxiety to a distance; when the cup is filled with all the ingredients of worldly enjoyment—such as health and plenty and domestic quiet,—you are often in secret exquisitely miserable. You know and feel that Jehovah has a controversy with you, that there hangs upon you the dread weight of unpardoned guilt, and that you are wholly unprepared to meet your God in the judgment. You have contrived from time to time, by various expedients, to escape from the anguish with which the consciousness of guilt, when it is powerfully awakened, oppresses you. You perhaps resolved to break off from the sins by which you were more especially enslaved, and for a season you succeeded. And partial reformation flattering you into the belief that you had become new creatures, you got something like peace. Or, which is not an uncommon case, after the outbreking of conviction, when conscience told you how far you were from God, and what was your danger, you felt the necessity of having some more religion than you were satisfied with before; and by more reading of the word of God, and more careful waiting upon the means of grace for a time, you came to think that all is safe, and thus obtained something like peace. Or it may be, perhaps, that for the diseases of the wounded spirit you sought a remedy, not in any of the means which seemed, outwardly at least, to bring men nearer to God, but in the business, or the frivolities, or the pleasures of life; and in these you found

temporary peace, or, at all events, forgot your pangs. But if you were in all honesty to recount your experience, must you not acknowledge that all worldly expedients are ineffectual, and that they cannot remove, but only heal slightly, the wounds of the soul? Does not that peace you seem to have hang by a thread so slender, that the slightest breath can sweep it away? Does not a week or a day upon the sickbed bring wretchedness and terror with it? Does not a close appeal upon the certainty of the judgment to come scatter all your false comfort to the winds? Your peace is at the mercy of every accident, so long as it rests upon these poor devices to which you have had recourse. Oh, then, is it not time now to try the medicines of the great Healer,—the blood through which is conveyed mercy to pardon, and the grace which sanctifies and comforts? There can be no disappointment here. It is your meeting with the holy God in the life to come that incites these terrible convictions. And does He not Himself assure you that there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus? Believe, then, in Him whom God hath sent, in earnest seek to have His precious remedies applied to you, and then you will pass out of the region of perplexity and fear into the sunshine of spiritual health and peace. Say to Him, ‘Lord, I have been a miserable rebel against Thee; I have been wedded to the sins which were destroying my soul; I have trampled under foot the blood of the covenant; I have done despite unto the Spirit of grace; and now I feel that I am ruined. But encouraged by Thine invitation, I come to Thee. Thou hast told me that the blood of Thy dear Son cleanseth from all sin. I believe Thy word. Lord, cleanse me; heal my soul. Thou hast promised grace to help. On that grace I cast myself, for I am altogether helpless. Lord, save me, I perish.’ Carry these words to the Physician, O sinner, and thou wilt find that there is mercy with the Lord that He may be feared, and plenteous redemption; and that He redeemeth His Israel, His believing people, from all their iniquities. He will say to thee, ‘Be of good comfort,’ ‘I am the Lord that healeth thee.’

III. We come now, in the third place, and in continua-

tion of this train of remark, to speak for a little of the efficacy of the medicines of the divine Healer.

The sovereign cure which Christ holds out in the gospel for the healing of our spiritual diseases is no new and untried remedy, which promises much, only to leave the sufferer who seeks it in disappointment. It is the device of unerring wisdom; its origin is to be traced back to eternity itself, in the councils of the Godhead; and the date of its application is from the moment of the Fall. It is of unfailing virtue. And to encourage and comfort poor sinners who need it, the Physician has kept a record, and given us that record to read, of various cases, in which, during four thousand years, its efficacy was proved. Some of these cases are wonderful. So virulent and eventful was the distemper, and so apparently hopeless the recovery, that after the successful treatment of them we would pronounce no case beyond the reach of our Physician's skill. In heaven, among the redeemed, there are men whose life for many years, yea, for the best part of it, was stained by every crime; who, led captive by Satan at his will, were so hardened in iniquity, that their very soul might be said to be carnalized. Nothing beyond sense and self could interest them. But at length, by irresistible grace, awakened from their torpor, or rather summoned from the sleep of spiritual death, they were washed, and justified, and sanctified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God. There are in heaven, among the redeemed, not a few of those who were the murderers of the holy Jesus; but who, convinced of their guilt in that season of awakening which was experienced on the day of Pentecost, found the efficacy of the very blood which they had been the instruments of shedding, and walked afterwards in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, and in growing peace and purity. O my friends, there are strange things indeed written in this blessed record, the case-book of the Lord, the Healer, which tell us of the immeasurable compassion and tenderness of Him who applies the remedy, as well as of the resistless virtue of the remedy itself. What think you of the case of him who, after all the Lord's goodness to him, was dragged by sensuality into the lowest depths of criminal indulgence, and in connection with that, to the shed-

ding of innocent blood? Might not his disease have been pronounced desperate, and beyond all cure? Yet he was restored by our merciful and all-skilful Physician. He was first made sensible of his guilt and misery; then he was brought to cry for help: 'Wash me,' he cried, 'and I shall be clean; deliver me from blood-guiltiness, O God of my salvation;' and the Healer heard his cry and applied His medicines. He was washed and became whiter than snow; he received the clean heart and the right spirit; the joys of salvation were restored to him; and he is now at the right hand of God, having overcome by the blood of the Lamb. And again, what think ye of the case of him who, after being instructed in the law of God, which teaches mercy, and at the time of life when all the warm and generous and benevolent affections of the human heart should be in liveliest exercise, was present at the stoning to death of an innocent and holy man, and took a prominent part in the transaction, and who afterwards signalized himself yet more in the same course of cruelty and of guilt? Might not his condition have been viewed as hopeless? Yes; but he also was arrested in his mad career. The medicines were applied to him,—the blood and the grace. He felt them in all their efficacy; and if ever cure was wrought, it was wrought on him. He became the most shining among God's saints. And by the command of the great Physician, there was a special note recorded in the case-book with reference to this remarkable cure,—recorded by the man himself in whom the cure was wrought. He says in his first Epistle to Timothy, 'I thank Christ Jesus for putting me into the ministry, who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering for a pattern to them who should hereafter believe on Him to life everlasting.' O my friends, we delight to think often of this precious passage, and rejoice when we have opportunity to commend it to the notice of sin-burdened and perplexed inquirers after God. Unpardoned sinner, who wouldst fain escape from the wrath to come, but art almost afraid to hope for mercy, this note is written for thy special benefit. Here is one healed by Christ, whose guilt was more aggravated even than thine,



and who tells thee so, just that thou mayest be encouraged to come and be healed also. Backslider, these cases are recorded and this special note is written also for thee. How miserable thy condition! Thou hast not only wounded the tender consciences perchance of some of Christ's people, but thou hast caused His blessed name to be blasphemed. Yet thou mayest be restored. When the king of Israel was recovered, when Saul of Tarsus was converted, there was a miracle of mercy wrought surely as great as would be performed wert thou also healed. Look to the Physician; seek the medicines; and there will be life and health and comfort for thee also. Poor doubting inquirer after God, why continue to regard thy guilt as an insuperable barrier between thee and the great Physician? It was to wash such guilt away that the atoning blood was shed. It was to convince such as thou art that there is room for thee within the embrace of redeeming love, that Christ Jesus showed forth His long-suffering toward that persecutor, to whose case we have referred. Come thou, therefore, in faith to the remedy, and add thy testimony to the statement, that Christ is the Lord who healeth. Oh, marvellous efficacy of the blood and grace of Jesus! As fresh and as sovereign to heal now as when they were first applied. My brethren, if they were but applied here this day, they would make us indeed a congregation of living souls; the tongue of the dumb would be unloosed to celebrate the riches of the grace of God; the blind eyes would be opened to perceive the wonders of God's law; the lame would walk in the way of God's commandments; this house where we are assembled would be the pathway to heaven. And why should it not be so? Let us wrestle for it, let us look for it; for He is in the midst of us who is the Lord that healeth.

IV. Now I can do nothing more than glance at the two topics which remain. We were to consider, in the fourth place, the way in which Christ's medicines are applied.

I need scarcely say that that is by the agency of the Holy Spirit. How often is the remedy provided in the gospel set forth for men's acceptance, while yet not one is found to take it! How often is it presented to those who express no doubt

of its efficacy, and all this without avail! And why is it so? Just because the Spirit, whose office it is to render it effectual, withholds His energy. We wonder sometimes at the little fruit apparently produced by the great work of Christ? But we need not wonder. When the Spirit is dishonoured,—when He is quenched,—when He is so little sought after,—when mere creature-instruments are exalted to His place, it is not surprising that He should withdraw, and leave the Church in darkness and in barrenness, that His work may be rightly prized. Even when He does give the evidences of His presence and His power, what resistance is manifested, and what outcry sometimes against His agency! Is it not often true, that when He awakens some sinner from his indifference, and makes him feel his need of Christ, and sigh for the cleansing blood and the quickening grace, the friends of the awakened sinner are terrified lest his religion should ruin him for the world, and that they strive to undo as far as they can the Spirit's work? Is it not frequently the case, that just as the earthly physician, when he has to perform a delicate and precarious operation upon his patient, must place him beforehand under a strict regimen, and bind him hard down that he cannot move, so the Spirit who acts for Christ must first have the soul subdued by deep suffering, and the vanity and emptiness of all earthly things brought vividly home to it in the school of severe adversity, before the value of Christ's medicines is appreciated, and the blessings which He offers will be received? And just because it is so, vital religion is much opposed, and the Spirit grieved, and His grace withheld. O my friends, let us honour Him: then will He work! Let us listen to His pleadings. Let us court His presence. Then will the Sun of righteousness arise upon us with healing in His wings. Then will the peace of God which passeth understanding keep our heart and mind by Jesus Christ. And then, great grace being upon us all, we shall walk in the fear of God, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, and, like the first disciples, shall be edified.

Finally, I was to speak of the danger of rejecting the Healer and His medicines.

My friends, if your souls are to be healed at all, it can only be by Jesus, through your resting in His all-sufficient righteousness. We have said already that the means of cure are as fresh and free this day as they were four thousand years ago. But although this is true in one sense, it does not hold good in another. It may be said to the sinner who has rejected Christ year after year, and whose heart is hardened through the deceitfulness of sin,—it may be said to him upon his deathbed, Christ is the Physician, His blood cleanseth from all sin; but these words may reach his ear, only to call up the dreadful and agonizing feeling in his mind, The remedy was offered me before, and I would not *take* it then; I cannot *get* it now. Oh, my brethren, may the Spirit keep us from falling into such a fearful state, and enable us to improve the season of merciful visitation! This day, virtue is to go out of Christ; shall we not take it,—shall we not touch Him and be healed? This day He is to meet us in love at His table, to which He has sent us His own invitation. Let us commune with Him there; let us there appropriate His precious remedies; let us tell Him all the wants and diseases of our souls; and through the bread and wine—the remembrances of His humiliation for our sakes, of His shed blood, and of His unbounded grace—He will say to us, ‘Fear not, for I am the Lord that healeth thee.’ Amen.

## XIV.

### THE GLORY OF CHRIST AND OF THE CHURCH HIS SPOUSE.

‘The King’s daughter is all glorious within ; her clothing is of wrought gold. She shall be brought unto the King in raiment of needlework : the virgins her companions that follow her shall be brought unto Thee. With gladness and rejoicing shall they be brought : they shall enter into the King’s palace.’  
—Ps. XLV. 13–15.

IT is good for us, my dear friends, to accustom ourselves to look above the earth, toward heaven ; and the psalm from which the text has been selected calls us to this exercise. It treats principally of two subjects : the glory of Christ, the Church’s Head and Husband ; and the glory of the Church herself as the spouse of Christ, and thus the adopted daughter of the great King. The glory of Christ takes the precedence in the psalmist’s view, as it must naturally do in the view of every believer. We have no lengthened preface here. The heart of the writer seems unable to contain the emotions that struggle for utterance ; and without any previous description given of the personage whose praises he is to celebrate, yea, rather with prophetic eye beholding the heavenly Bridegroom, he exclaims at once, ver. 2, ‘Thou art fairer than the children of men ; grace is poured into Thy lips : therefore God hath blessed Thee for ever.’ And what believer is there that will not say Amen to this holy rapture ! There is no other person in the universe like Christ. In Him alone you have combined all that is imaginable of human excellence and all the perfections of the Godhead. When you look at Him, you perceive only one in the form of a servant ; a man treated with contempt and dishonour, and subjected to suffering beyond whatever fell or can fall upon any descendant of Adam. But when you look more closely, and perceive divinity shining through that human form ; when you see the Son of

God there—and *there* from love to sinners; when you think of your own obligations to that love, of what you would have been without it, and what you are through the manifestation of it; you cannot but hold up your hands, and, with the psalmist, say to Christ, ‘Thou art fairer than the children of men.’ But then the carnal mind perceives no beauty in Christ: the world is arrayed in opposition to Him. The mere exhibition of His personal and official glory and excellency will not attract or melt those who are in rebellion against God. It did not attract and melt the men among whom He lived. For although faith saw in Him ‘one fairer than the children of men,’ the world cried out, ‘Away with him.’ And hence we have in the psalm before us a very sudden transition. From the description of the *personal* beauty of Christ, the psalmist carries us at once into a scene of stirring warfare. Ver. 3. ‘Gird Thy sword upon Thy thigh, O most Mighty, with Thy glory and Thy majesty;’ and again, ver. 5, ‘Thine arrows are sharp in the heart of the king’s enemies; whereby the people fall under Thee.’ Here there is hot conflict; the sword unsheathed, and the arrows flying; and this warfare carried on by Him ‘who is fairer than the children of men.’ You know what this means, my friends. Sinners must be subdued by the power of Christ’s grace before they will accept Him as their Lord. The sword spoken of is the Word, elsewhere called the sword of the Spirit; and the arrows are those sharp texts of the Word which come home to the consciences of sinners, not as with a downright blow, but rather as with a sudden smart, yet still producing the same effect, wounding first that the need of healing may be felt. And I am sure that there are some hearing me who can understand the distinction between the effect of the divine Word prostrating the sinner at once, as if he were cut down by the sword, and the effect produced when one text after another, like one arrow shot after another, lays him low, and makes him feel that without Christ he is lost. Proceeding onward in the examination of the psalm, we have the scene again suddenly changed. The Church’s spouse is represented as returning from His toils and conflicts crowned with victory, and entering upon the peaceful enjoyment of His kingdom. He

is hailed accordingly by the psalmist as occupying His throne, and swaying the sceptre of righteousness over His happy subjects: Ver. 6. 'Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever: the sceptre of Thy kingdom is a right sceptre.' And now, after all this, when He has fought and conquered, and has taken possession of His kingdom, there comes the preparation for His nuptials. And first, the decorations of the Bridegroom are described, as in vers. 7 and 8. In His person fairer than the children of men He is anointed with the oil of gladness, and clad in vestments that smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia. The allusion here you cannot fail at once to perceive. The offices and the work of Christ are attractive to His people, as well as the glory of His person. They love Him for what He is; but they love Him also for what He has done, and for what He still does. There is a sweetness about the very name of Christ, which gains the heart of the believer. He lost all His beauty, and His name became a reproach in the estimation of the unbelieving world, when He was nailed to the cross, with His visage marred, and His side pierced and bleeding. But what commends Him to the love of the Church, His spouse, is just those very wounds, the tokens of His love for her. He would not have been her Christ, her Teacher, her High Priest, her King, if He had not been thus marred and wounded; and what constitutes His disfigurement in the world's view, forms His very loveliness in the view of the believer. It is a circumstance not to be passed without notice, which John records in the Gospel, that when the body of the Redeemer was taken down from the cross, Nicodemus 'brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes; and they took the body, and wound it in linen clothes with the spices, as the manner of the Jews is to bury.' Are we not to look to this fact as the true key to the meaning of the psalmist's words, 'All Thy garments smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia'? To the despiser of the truth, the linen clothes and the spices recall only the ideas of the ignominy of the cross and the degradation of the sepulchre; but to the Church, the spouse of Christ, they are the fairest ornaments that ever were worn, and the sweetest spices that ever perfumed the air; for the crowning token of His love for her was then given, when He

condescended to go down into the grave for her sake. But then there follows next the preparation of the bride for the nuptials. And borrowing here his figurative description from the custom of the times, the psalmist represents the Church, Christ's bride, as brought to Him in the midst of a joyous procession, enriched with costly presents, and 'clad in the most splendid attire.' 'The King's daughter is all glorious within; her clothing is of wrought gold. She shall be brought unto the King in raiment of needlework: the virgins, her companions, that follow her shall be brought unto Thee. With gladness and rejoicing shall they be brought: they shall enter into the King's palace.' Had the time permitted, we might have profitably gone into a more minute exposition of this wonderful psalm. But even from the few passing glances we have taken, I think you will be able to perceive how beautifully the train of thought pursued by the psalmist harmonizes with the experience of the Christian. When sharp conviction of sin has been wrought in the sinner's heart, he would be driven to despair, were he not blessed with some glimpses of the Saviour's grace and beauty. By these his spirit is sustained, and he begins to think that even for him there is hope. But the struggle is not ended yet. While there is in the contemplation of Christ's person and of His work, of His atoning sacrifice and of His glorious resurrection, everything to commend Him to the sinner as the very Saviour he needs, there is still a rebel will to be subdued, there is still awaiting that complete and unreserved surrender of understanding, and will, and affection to Christ, which must be made before a man can say, 'My Beloved is mine, and I am His.' Hence the necessity of the sword and the arrows, of Christ's all-conquering grace, to bring the whole soul of the sinner with all its powers into subjection to Himself. The process by which this work is wrought is sometimes a protracted and always a painful one. To the effecting of it there are oftentimes required not only the lessons of the Word, but the severe discipline of a frowning providence. But when, by the Spirit's blessing of the means, it is effected,—when the heart of the sinner is wholly won over to Christ, and the will is thoroughly captivated, oh! there is then intense delight experienced in looking up to Him as the King of Zion, reigning

on His throne, and in paying Him all grateful homage; then the sceptre of His kingdom is indeed acknowledged to be a right sceptre, even when He is pleased to chastise and to restrain; then all His garments smell of myrrh, and aloes, and cassia, and He is felt to be worthy of His people's undivided service and highest love. Now in all this, I think we have truly although dimly marked out what accords with the experience of Christ's followers; and in so doing, we have just traced the course of the psalmist's illustrations: for, first, he places before us Him that is fairer than the children of men; then He exhibits Him to us as warring and subduing; then he points to Him as seated on His throne, holding the sceptre of righteousness; and after that he shows Him arrayed in the garments perfumed with spices—that is, gaining yet more and more upon the affections of His ransomed ones, and satisfying them more and more with the communications of His grace. But we must leave this hasty sketch, however, to be filled up by yourselves in your private meditations upon this divine song, and proceed now to the more special consideration of the passage which has been selected as the text. It is very rich, full of high and elevating sentiments, and well fitted, we trust, to suggest reflections to us in harmony with the solemn exercises in which we are to be engaged. It may, no doubt, occur to you that the language which the psalmist employs is, in many respects, too grand for a description of the Church of Christ in any of the stages of her earthly history. And certainly it will only be fully verified in the world to come, when every one of His redeemed people shall be perfectly conformed to His image, and admitted to the immediate enjoyment of Himself. But then let it be remembered at the same time, that as the same Christ who now reigns in glory was once the man of sorrows upon earth, so it is the same Church that now suffers and contends for Christ's name's sake that will be the partaker of His love and of His honour in heaven. And whatever is said of her beauty and of her blessedness in the state to which she is to be raised, must in some measure be applicable to her in the state of humiliation through which she must pass here below. Let it be remembered also, that what is said of the Church at large is applicable more or less



to every believer; so that, my friends, in considering the words of the text, we must not lose ourselves in looking exclusively into the far distant futurity, and in thinking of that vast multitude, which no man can number, that shall reign with Christ for ever and ever. We must keep this fully in our view, that in all the endearing names which Christ gives to the Church, in the ornaments, and the glory, and the blessedness which are conferred upon her, every individual believer has a share, and that in her future exaltation every individual believer will participate. With these remarks, then,—

I. Observe, in the first place, the name which is applied to the Church in the text. She is called ‘the King’s daughter.’ The King is Jehovah; and the Church is called His daughter, because she is adopted into His family as the spouse of His well-beloved Son. Now, my friends, we feel as if we might on this single topic employ the remainder of our discourse, so many thoughts rush into our mind in connection with it. But we must rest contented with a few remarks. Your attention will be arrested *first* of all by the language of endearment which is here used: ‘The daughter of the King.’ And just think of it for a moment. Would it not be accounted, or rather is it not accounted, a mark of purest affection, when, the member of any family having introduced into the family his bride, a stranger, and brought from a great distance, the father receives her with open arms, and says to her, ‘You are my daughter now, and we bid you welcome’? And were it so that the son had united himself to one far beneath him in rank, and that after all, when he brought her home, the father said, ‘Fear not, you are now to regard yourself as my daughter,’ would not the heart of the poor stranger be melted by these words of affection, and would not a happy light be shed upon all her future prospects? Now, this is a kind of image of the idea conveyed by the psalmist’s words, ‘The daughter of the King.’ Jehovah Himself comes to the poor sinner who has embraced Christ, and who is recognised by Christ as His, and says, ‘Thou art my son; thou art my daughter.’ It matters not from what depth of degradation that sinner has been drawn; it matters not what ill-repute he has formerly had in the world; it mat-

ters not how sensible he may be of his own vileness: when Christ has him by the hand, and he returns Christ's embrace, Jehovah says to him, 'Forget thine own people and thy father's house; thou art my child.' 'To as many as receive Christ, to them He gives power to become the sons of God, even to those who believe in His name.' There is something inexpressibly gracious and tender in this dealing of the Lord toward creatures so miserable as we are by nature! The peculiar title conferred upon Christ Himself is that of the Son of God. This title, indeed, belongs to Him in a sense in which it cannot belong to any created being: 'For to which of the angels said Jehovah at any time, Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee?' But surely it does mark the love of God toward those who believe in Christ, that He should bestow upon them this name, so peculiarly given to the 'Eternal Word;' and that He should say to each of them, 'Thou art my son; thou art my daughter.' 'Behold what manner of love the Father hath conferred upon us, that we should be called the sons of God!' But again, the expression here used, 'The daughter of *the King*,' marks the dignity to which believers are raised, and the vastness of the inheritance which is reserved for them. The psalmist says elsewhere, 'Who is like unto the Lord our God, who raiseth the poor out of the dust, that He may set him with princes, even with the princes of His people?' 'The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: the lines are fallen unto me in pleasant places; yea, I have a goodly heritage.' My friends, if we judge rightly, we cannot look upon any one whom we believe to be a true disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ without feeling that he is entitled to our reverence. He is one of the children of the great King; Jehovah owns him, as we have already seen, and permits him to address Him in the endearing language, 'Abba, Father.' And not only so. There is a spirit given to him befitting the high rank to which he is exalted, and the high character which he has to sustain. The mere name of a son or daughter of the King, if there were no fitness imparted for upholding the dignity, would only tend to degradation. We can all understand well enough what is meant by *upstart* greatness, as when persons are raised to honour, without possessing the feelings, and the accomplish-

ments, and the tastes which befit their station. In that case, the rank to which they are raised does not ennoble *them* ; but they disgrace it, and make it a mockery. The man, born to enjoy a large inheritance, and to be dignified with high titles, who should delight in the lowest society, and have no relish but for the most grovelling pursuits, would not only be an object of scorn himself, but would also bring dishonour upon his rank and titles. And so, in like manner, if the sons and daughters of the great King were not animated by a spirit becoming the glorious relationship to which they are promoted, and the dignity which is conferred upon them, they would cast the stain of infamy upon the very name they bear. We know, by sad experience, that when those assume the name who have no right to assume it, their inconsistencies and their open sins make religion a bye-word. But then, let the disgrace rest upon the persons, and not upon the cause which they profess to advocate. *They* cannot be the sons and daughters of the King who are content to wallow in the mire, and who are the slaves of this world's pleasures. We read in the Scripture of 'the spirit of adoption ;' and 'because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts.' Here is *that* which elevates the children of the King, and which fits them for the dignity with which they are invested. The Spirit of God is in them ; and by His presence in them, and the changes through His operation wrought upon all their views and likings, they are filled with high and heavenly desires, in accordance with their heavenly birth, their kingly nature, and their exalted destiny !

It has been said already, that we cannot look upon a true follower of Christ without the conviction that he is entitled to our reverence. However mean he may be as to worldly origin, his body is a temple of the Holy Ghost ; however poor he may be as to worldly circumstances, and however much despised by those who have no eye to discern spiritual worth and grandeur, he has a soul filled with loftier aspirations, and a moral sense more capable of relishing all that is pure, and excellent, and worthy to be loved, than any of those who occupy the highest pinnacle of earthly rank, but who have not the Spirit of God. The children of the King feel as none

others can feel; they think as none others can think; they are actuated by principles which none can appreciate but those who have the same mind in them that was also in Christ Jesus. And then, besides all this, to them also belongs the dignity of being heirs to a vast inheritance. They have sometimes little more than bread and water upon earth; but even if they have more, what is it when compared with the glory that is to be revealed? The King who claims them as His own is the Lord of the whole universe; and they, as adopted into His family, have a right to enjoy all the good that is in the boundless universe. When, amid the stillness of the evening, we look up to the heaven above us, and mark the shining orbs with which it is studded; and when, in connection with this, we think of what the Bible says, 'All things are yours,' we cannot but adore the goodness which hath dictated these words. They seem to convey to us this idea: 'Cherish high expectations of the coming inheritance; your Father has enough to give. If all these worlds with which space is peopled were spots of blessedness, and you were privileged to pass from one to the other, drinking in the blessedness of each; and if there should be any end to your enjoyment, or any lack, then come back to Jehovah Himself, for He is the portion of your souls.' My friends, when the Lord calls the Church the King's daughter, He gives her everything to possess which the King has. And what wonder is it though believers count the profits and honours and pleasures of this world as comparatively insignificant, when they have prospects before them so much more glorious! Oh, it would be most profitable for our own souls, and very beneficial to the ungodly world, if we would live more by faith upon the inheritance to which we look forward. Let us realize it; and let us act upon the dignity which at present belongs to us. No man has the right even to imagine that the followers of Christ are to be partakers of the world's sins and follies. And if any should imagine it, let us treat them as their ignorance deserves. Let us show them that we have something better to enjoy than *they* have; and that we can be happy without them—far more happy than they can make us. The Church is the daughter of the King. Believers are the children of the King. They are, therefore, entitled to put their foot

upon the world, and to say, 'We cannot submit to your maxims; we cannot defile ourselves with your vain pleasures; we look to something higher and better.'

But now, after speaking of the privilege and dignity of the Church, in her being called 'the King's daughter,' there comes the question, How are poor sinners raised to such preferment? And in the answer to this question, although much might be said, there is only time at present for a sentence or two; and these sentences must have reference to the work of Christ. The Church is the King's daughter, because she is the bride of the King's Son. Jacob did service that his wives might be given unto him: Christ did service to gain His spouse. First of all, He emptied Himself of His glory, and came into this world a partaker of flesh and blood, because those whom He was to redeem were partakers of the same. Then He paid the ransom for them, that He might be empowered to take them with Him, and make them sharers of His own blessedness. You will not forget that the Church, the bride of Christ, lay under the condemnation of the divine law—under the curse; and that without His interposition in her behalf she must have perished. There could not have been a higher wall of separation raised up between her and Jehovah than that which was raised, when, through the breach of the covenant, the curse, carrying death in it, passed upon the whole race of Adam. All friendly intercourse between heaven and earth might have been supposed from that moment for ever at an end. But it had entered into the eternal councils, that all mankind should not be lost; and accordingly the Son of God came into the world to seek His spouse, and to carry her home to the Father's habitation. He became the servant of the Father for her redemption. It was a manifestation of love on His part without parallel, that we read of in the Scripture. No illustration could do justice to it. For the sake of the Church whom He had selected as His spouse, the Son of God appeared as a man, in order that He might be able to obey the law, and suffer, and die, and lie in the grave for her. 'The Son of the King' came into this distant province of the Father's empire, because His spouse was there. He came to make her His own. And when that could not be

until He had paid her ransom, He scrupled not to give Himself as her ransom, and to become a curse for her sake, enduring the cross, despising the shame. And now when we read of the Church as the daughter of the King, we need not wonder. She is the daughter of the King, because Christ the King's Son presents her to the Father as His own blood-bought possession; and the Father says, 'All thine are mine, and mine are thine; and I am glorified in them.' These expressions, then, my friends, which we have in the text, 'The daughter of the King,' are no unmeaning words as applied to the followers of Christ. Jehovah recognises them as His own, because they are the purchase of His own Son's blood. Yes, and more than that, they are the objects of His own eternal love. When the Son brings home to the Father the ransomed Church, and presents her as His bride, she is not only acknowledged as the fruit of His soul's travail, but as chosen of the Father before the foundation of the world.

II. But having said thus much with respect to the *name* which is applied to the Church in the text, we must now proceed to speak of the *decorations* with which she is invested. 'The King's daughter is all glorious within: her clothing is of wrought gold. She shall be brought unto the King in raiment of needlework.' First of all, it is necessary here that we understand clearly the meaning of the psalmist's words. As we read them, they convey the general idea which we would desire at present to enforce and illustrate; but by a slight change the sense may be brought out much more intelligibly. Without any alteration of the words, the meaning would be expressed better if you were to read the verse in this way: 'The King's daughter is all glorious;' then placing the pause there, you go on to read, 'within her clothing is of wrought gold.' The meaning is, that the King's daughter is arrayed in two robes, of which the inner one, which is hidden from the sight, is of cloth woven with golden thread, while the outer one which covers it is of needlework, embroidered with the hand. The two together constitute the decorations of the bride, the spouse of Christ; the golden robe within, the embroidery without. If an uninspired man

had been asked to tell how these vestments should be arranged, being informed at the same time that they consisted of golden cloth and of embroidery, he would have put the embroidery innermost and the golden cloth outermost, thinking no doubt that that which was most dazzling should be made most conspicuous. The inspired writer, however, makes a different arrangement, and it cannot be without reason. I think you will have no difficulty in apprehending the reason why the inner garment should be of gold, and the outer one of embroidered work. Gold in the Scripture is used as the emblem of that which is most pure, and excellent, and precious; and therefore when we read of it as forming the inner clothing of the Church, the Lamb's spouse, we are at once led to think of that which makes her pure, and excellent, and precious in the sight of God, viz. the righteousness of Christ imputed to her. Or to make the subject more special and more intelligible, the psalmist, in the words under our consideration, would impress this truth upon our minds, that every believer in Christ is invested with a twofold excellency: first, he has the inner robe of gold, which denotes his being accepted as righteous through the righteousness of Christ imputed to him; and secondly, he is clothed with the graces of the Spirit, which form the outward embroidery here spoken of. Or more particularly still, the followers of Christ consist of those who are both justified and sanctified. Justification is the golden robe, and sanctification is the embroidered one. Let us then briefly advert to these two decorations of the Church. I do not mean to treat *formally* of the doctrines that have been mentioned, but merely to glance at them as they are brought before us in the text.

First then, with respect to the bride's clothing of gold. This is the justifying righteousness of the believer, in virtue of which he stands with acceptance before God. Observe then, *first*, it is spoken of as the inner vestment, because it is not seen by any onlooker. No man *can* possibly know with absolute certainty that even his dearest friend has been accepted of God, and is in the enjoyment of His favour. All who feel deep concern about the salvation of their own souls, would gladly think that those whom they love most tenderly

were also among the redeemed; but the result is not fully known, except by the believer himself and God, until the judgment of the great day. Notice, *secondly*, that the inner vestment is spoken of as framed of gold, to denote the *preciousness* of that imputed righteousness in virtue of which the believer is accepted of God. The divine law requires a perfect righteousness. If one commandment is broken, the whole law is trampled on. For the same authority which makes *one* precept binding upon me, makes every precept binding; and so if I break one, I trample upon the sovereign authority on which the obligation of the whole law rests. When we measure ourselves, then, by the law, we are lost. We come short in every respect of the righteousness which the law demands; and we can make no compensation to it for our past shortcomings. It is impossible for any man to keep any commandment of the law more perfectly than the law enjoins; and hence he cannot set up that as a compensation for his shortcomings in other commandments. For instance, it is impossible for any one to be more benevolent than the law commands us to be. If any one among us were to part with every earthly possession he has, and to be contented to live on the charity of others, he would not make the law his debtor. He cannot *rightcously* do more than the law demands; and should he think that he does that in one respect, what is to become of him as a transgressor in every other respect? I have made these remarks, my friends, that you may be affected by a sense of the solemn truth, that by nature you lie under the curse and condemnation of the law, and that you may thus perceive more clearly the preciousness of Immanuel's righteousness. As His people's substitute, He obeyed the law perfectly, and endured its dread penalty; and now what He did is imputed to all who believe in His name. They are counted one with Him, and thus enjoy the benefit of His finished work. Jehovah is well pleased with them for His righteousness' sake. There is no flaw nor blemish in His obedience; and so there is no one who can lay anything to the charge of those who are *in* Him. How blessed, then, is the condition of the believer, sheltered from the condemnation of the fiery law under the covert of a righteousness that can



be impeached by none ! The sinner out of Christ is described as wretched and naked. And may not the believer in Christ be well described as clad in a golden robe ? It is with reference to this clothing, and looking to the Church as seen not with her own wants and pollutions, but as covered over with His own spotless righteousness, that the heavenly Bridegroom says to her, ‘Behold, thou art fair, my love ; behold, thou art fair : behold, thou art fair, my beloved ; yea, pleasant.’

2. But we must now go on to notice further, that the golden robe is concealed under an embroidered vestment of needle-work. The righteousness *imputed* is always accompanied with a righteousness *imparted*. Christ beautifies His bride with holiness. He makes her comely with His own comeliness put upon her. We read, 2 Sam., that the king’s daughters that were virgins were apparelled with robes of divers colours. It is from this circumstance that the figurative language in the text is taken, in order to denote the varied graces befitting their close relationship to God, which form the peculiar ornament of all His people. These graces we cannot at the present time attempt to enumerate. But as in any piece of embroidered work there are certain colours and figures which attract the eye, and cast all besides into the shade ; so among the graces that adorn the children of the King, there are three that shine with a peculiar lustre, and by their brighter radiance eclipse the rest : these three are faith, hope, and love. Faith is put first, because when the Holy Spirit quickens the dead soul and makes it a living soul, its first act is faith. In the natural creation, when the Lord breathed into the nostrils of the figure that had been fashioned out of the dust of the earth into the form of man, and gave it life, the first sign of life was motion. In the spiritual creation, when the soul dead in sin is made alive, the first sign of life is faith, and that is nothing else than the motion of the soul upward to heaven. No being can live and thrive but in its proper element. And as heaven is the proper element of the heaven-born soul, its tendency must ever be toward heaven. Now it is by faith it creeps, or climbs, or soars, heavenward ; yea, faith even brings heaven down to it, for ‘faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.’ Look at that vast crowd of

infatuated mortals that make pleasure and the world their god: see with what eager haste they pursue their favourite phantoms, all reckless of the issue! Look again at the few who stand aloof, pitying the folly of these self-destroyers, and having neither eye nor heart for their frivolities and pleasures. These are the children of the King, the men who live by faith! They are pilgrims and strangers on earth. Their view is directed toward heaven, their fatherland; their hearts are there; they are not of the world, they live by faith. In the meantime, however, they are surrounded by trials, and exposed to numberless discouragements, both within and without. But *hope* comes in to sustain them, and casts a ray of light upon their souls even in the darkest night. You will know that they are the children of the King, because in circumstances where the worldling would be found utterly unnerved, and almost in despair, the comforts of the King are with *them*. By this, however, they are especially known, viz. by their love. The life of Christ was a life of love, and so is theirs. His heart burned with love, and so does theirs. I do not say that in them the flame is so pure or so intense as it was in Him, but it is the same kind of flame. Christ loved the Father *supremely*; so do they, although, alas, not unmixedly. Christ loved the Father's law, and so do they. Christ never beheld human suffering without being moved by it; His heart bled for the miseries of men; and so His people are always the foremost to relieve suffering, and to mitigate the woes of others. But more particularly in this was the love of Christ manifested, that He came to labour and to die for the salvation of perishing souls. He gladly did good to the bodies of men, but their souls were His peculiar care. And in this respect His people resemble Him. You will find many who take an interest in the temporal well-being of men; many who would willingly put their hand to the work of diffusing knowledge among the ignorant, and raising them in the social scale; but then they think not of the soul, they think not of eternity. Herein, therefore, lies one most obvious distinction between the children of the world and the children of the King. The latter feel as if nothing were gained when the soul is not gained. They do not overlook what pertains to the

body and to this life, but their highest concern is about the soul and the life to come. It must be so, because they are animated by love ; and love will not be satisfied without the advancement of the *highest* good of its object. It is love that seeks after and lifts up the poor victims of ignorance and crime whom the world has cast off. It is love that counsels the wanderer to come into the fold of Christ. It is love that circulates the word of life for the salvation of the perishing : the same love that would forego temporal comforts to relieve the destitute. But I cannot enlarge here, although the field is most inviting. In one word I would say, Love is the chief ingredient of holiness ; and to be perfected in holiness, is to be perfected in love. ‘God is love ;’ and to have our hearts affected as God requires, is to be like Him. The progress of the believer is just the growing supremacy of love in his soul ; and if we say *that* man among us is nearest to God and nearest to glory who has most of the mind of Christ, that is just in other words to say, that *he* is nearest to God in whose breast there burns most brightly and steadily the sacred flame of love to God and love to the souls of men. I would have gladly said more, my friends, of the decorations of the Church, but the time forbids. Let this one remark be added, that in the present world she is only putting on her beautiful garments for her coming nuptials. The inner robe of gold cannot be made more glorious, for there can be nothing added to the righteousness of Christ. Believers will not be more completely justified at the judgment-seat of God than they are in this world at the moment *when* they believe. But the embroidered robe may be more and more beautified. The graces of faith and hope and love, and all the kindred excellences which are wrought in them by the Spirit of God, shall grow, and shine with increasing brightness, until the soul, wholly animated and actuated by the love of Christ, and thus conformed to His image, is made fit for dwelling in His immediate presence, and seeing Him as He is.

III. Now, in the third and last place, let us consider for a moment the glorious destiny of the Church. It is written in these words : ‘ With gladness and rejoicing they shall be brought

unto the King: they shall enter into the King's palace.' It is at this part of the psalmist's description that we feel most vividly that the whole passage relates rather to the Church in her triumphant than in her militant state. For assuredly the language savours more of heaven than of earth. And yet, without any straining, it may be applied to the condition of Christ's people here. It is, indeed, the true birthday, or the marriage-day, of the Church (for they are coincident) that is celebrated here in these rapturous strains. It is *her birthday*; for we are brought here to the morning of the resurrection, when Christ's Church shall begin her new and real existence, the soul of each of her members being united to a body fashioned like unto Christ's glorious body. It is her *marriage-day*; for at the resurrection Christ will openly acknowledge her as His own, and take her home to Himself. But then every individual believer has his spiritual birthday, which is also the day of his union to Christ, and which should be a day of gladness and rejoicing. It is a day of joy in heaven: 'There is joy among the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.' And no wonder. Another member added to the family of God, another union to Christ, cannot but gladden the hearts of those to whom Christ is all in all. And further, the words are not without meaning—'They shall enter into the King's palace'—even when they are applied to the present condition of those who are born again by the Spirit of God, and united to the Redeemer. Jehovah takes them by the hand, and brings them near to Himself. He admits them, as the Scripture expresses it, into the secret of His presence. Clearer discoveries they will hereafter receive of all the perfections and dealings of the Lord; but they receive as much even now as is sufficient to comfort and uphold them. 'The secret of the Lord,' the Scripture tells us, 'is with them that fear Him.' It is a blessed truth, and may well minister to the comfort of the people of God. If, on this side the grave, when we are only admitted, as it were, into the vestibule of the King's palace, we learn so much, and enjoy so much; what will be our blessedness, both in knowing and enjoying, when, in the other world, we are taken into the very recesses of the palace, and see all its beauties, and all the beauties of the King Him-

self! Bring faith into exercise for a moment, my friends, and let us try to realize the future glory. See the countless multitude that is assembled before Christ the Judge of all. What stillness there is! A breath would be heard. The solemn sentence is waited for from His lips, which is to fix irrevocably the destiny of all! Oh, eternity! Men laughed at the word on earth, but it is reality now,—when the gate of heaven is opened for the admission of the redeemed, and the gate of hell, black and terrible, stands wide for the reception of its prisoners! My friends, *we* shall be in that assembly, and our destiny shall be fixed there, without the possibility of change. Oh, may we be on the right hand of the Judge, and be welcomed into the joy of our Lord! Then only it will be known what is meant by the Spirit's words: 'With gladness and rejoicing they shall be brought unto the King: they shall enter into the King's palace.' Gladness and rejoicing: yes, there will be *that* on that day. When Christ says—and His people will feel as if He spoke to each of them individually—'You have acknowledged me before men: enter into the joy of your Lord,' there will be such gladness as if the sound of it should shake even the heaven itself. And then the redeemed will be carried into the palace, and will see all its glories, and enjoy all the fulness of God in Christ. My friends, the thought has sometimes occurred to us, What if there should be separations in eternity among those who are dear to each other upon earth? It is a question perhaps prompted rather by vain curiosity than by faith. But whether or not, of this we are certain, that the blessedness of believers in eternity will consist in the enjoyment of God, and that will be sufficient. But are there any dear to us on earth, let us strive to take them with us. The notes of joy will be the more gladly raised, when the voices of those we love here are united with our own in ascribing glory and honour and blessing unto Him that sitteth on the throne, and to the Lamb that was slain. Amen.

## XV.

### CHRIST THE SHEPHERD OF HIS PEOPLE.

‘And when he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him : for they know his voice.’—JOHN X. 4.

NOT having had opportunity to address you last Lord’s day, I would embrace the present occasion to follow up the solemn services in which we were so lately engaged. Our communion season is past, and perhaps there are some who may suppose that any allusion to it is now unnecessary and uncalled for. Their notions of a communion are limited to a particular day, and to the exercises therewith connected ; and any special reference made to the subject at any other time is felt by them as if it were made out of place. There is so much of the spirit of formality among us, that we are in danger of converting sacred ordinances, which the Lord has designed to be for the nourishment of our souls, into mere matters of outward ceremony ; which, with all the accompaniments of time and place and circumstance, we put instead of that service of the heart, and that daily communion with Him, which the Lord requires, and which it is blessedness for the creature to yield. Formality, therefore, would say, The communion season is gone ; why make any reference to it now ? Our answer would be, Vows were then made, and it is well that they should be remembered. I design, then, to address you on the present occasion as if we had come but a Sabbath ago from the Lord’s table ; and may the Spirit render our meditations profitable. The chapter from which the text is taken presents Christ to us as sustaining a character which, in the prophetic language of the Old Testament, He is often made to bear—that of the shepherd of His people. How beautifully does Isaiah speak of Him under this character, when he says, ‘He shall feed His flock like a shepherd : He

shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young !' And to the same effect the psalmist says, 'Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, Thou that leadest Joseph like a flock ; Thou that dwellest between the cherubims, shine forth.' Our Lord, then, as if to identify Himself with these and similar prophetic announcements which had been made respecting Him, describes Himself in the chapter before us as the good shepherd, and His people as the flock. 'I am the good shepherd,' He says (ver. 14), 'and know my sheep, and am known of mine.' And in the words of the text He represents Himself as performing one of the particular offices of the good shepherd : 'When he putteth forth his own sheep, he goeth before them, and the sheep follow him : for they know his voice.' It is not necessary that we attempt to illustrate with minuteness the allusions made in this chapter to the life and habits of the shepherd, which are all borrowed from the customs that prevailed, and that still prevail, in the East ; but a brief reference to the subject is requisite to bring out the full meaning of the text. We are accustomed, in thinking of the shepherd and the flock, to connect together the two ideas of the flock going first, and the shepherd behind them, driving them onward. But this was not the custom in Judea. In Palestine, in old times, as now, the shepherd went before the sheep, and they followed him just as the dog follows his master. And when there was a large enclosure for pasturage, and many flocks and many shepherds were assembled together, then every particular shepherd had his own call, when he wished to assemble his flock and to lead them into the fold ; and either by his voice or by some instrument he gathered the sheep around him, and having put them forth from the enclosure where they had been feeding, he placed himself at their head, and led them to the place of security where they were to pass the night. It is therefore a picture drawn from real life which our Lord gives us in the text, when He says that the good shepherd, having put forth his own sheep, goeth before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice ; or, as the expression means, they know the particular sound by which he calls them. Now, having made these

preliminary remarks, we come to the more special consideration of the text. It traces out, as you will perceive, the path of the believer, making this its great characteristic, that it is the following of Christ. He goes before, and the sheep follow Him. And here we cannot refrain from pausing for a moment to admire the wisdom and goodness of God in having so arranged it, that Christ's people should have for their guidance, and as an example to them in every part of the course which they are required to tread, not merely the abstract precepts of the law, pure and perfect as they are, but a living exemplification of these precepts in the character and walk of the Son of God, who was found in fashion as a man. Who is not sensible of the vast difference that holds practically between even the most minute directions that are issued for the performance of any piece of work, and the actual opportunity of seeing it carried through all its stages by a skilful workman! And just so here, while we have in the preceptive parts of the divine Word an exact description of what the Lord would have His people be, and what He would have them do, we are privileged to look away from the mere precept to the Lord Christ Jesus, and to see in His life—in the way in which He thought and felt and acted—a complete embodiment of the whole will of God, a perfect living representation of that conformity to the divine image which we are commanded to attain. 'Christ the good shepherd goes before the sheep, and the sheep follow Him.' And now there are several topics suggested for our consideration by the words of the text, with any one of which we might occupy the present discourse. 'Christ going before His people' is one subject that would not be easily exhausted. His people following Him, as the sheep used to follow the shepherd, is another subject that would open up a wide field for remark. And the reason why they follow Him, 'because they know His voice,' might also be largely insisted on. Many other things might be spoken of, as the relation between Christ and His people as shepherd and sheep. But what I would endeavour at present to accomplish is, with all possible briefness, to combine the two particulars of 'Christ going before, and His people following Him.' We shall not have time to offer any



remarks on the interesting topic, the reason why they follow Him, 'because they know His voice.'

Let us then consider for a little the truth here stated, that Christ goes before His people, and *they follow* Him. Under this head there is room for many special remarks. When Christ, by the agency of the Holy Ghost, has awakened any perishing sinner from the sleep of self-security, and of spiritual death; when, by the same agency, through the instrumentality of the word of truth, He has subdued the rebellious heart of that sinner, and has excited in him holy and heavenly desires; when, to make use of the figure in the text, He has brought the lost sheep into the pasturage, and is leading him to the fold, the resting-place: then He goes first Himself, not only to show the way, but to make trial of the way, that the sheep may not have to go in any other track than that which has been trodden by the shepherd Himself. If the road is rough and uneven and miry, He does not draw aside Himself to seek a better and more comfortable path, leaving the sheep to make their way without Him; but still He goes before them. If there is danger on the road, which would make an hireling flee and leave the flock to their fate, the shepherd faces the danger, and risks all for the safety of the sheep. And when the final resting-place is gained, He is the first to enter it, only that the flock may come after and enjoy the shelter along with Him. These observations contain the substance of the remarks which I am now about to offer, and which may be arranged in the following order: *First*, Christ goes before His people in the path of holy obedience; *secondly*, in the path of suffering and tribulation; *thirdly*, He goes before them to the grave; *fourthly*, to the judgment; and *fifthly*, to the heavenly glory; and in all these paths they follow Him.

I. *First*, Christ goes before His people in the path of *holy obedience*. The Word of God has described the way to eternal life as narrow and arduous; and no one who has entered on it will describe it otherwise. To have the heart so regulated that every affection shall be concentrated upon Jehovah the supreme good, while yet there are ten thousand objects, seen and temporal, that put in a claim for its homage;

to have the thoughts and desires under such control, that when we walk abroad, or sit in the quietude of our own homes, the central-point toward which every thought and desire converges shall be in accordance with the will of God, while at the same time we live in a world which will have us serve its vanities and idols; to exercise the self-restraint which the divine law imposes if we would act according to its precepts, while we are solicited on every side to follow our own inclinations, as if that alone were liberty;—to do all this, is, in part at least, and yet only in part, to live as Christians should do. And when we survey even the imperfect sketch that has been given of such a life, is it not almost sufficient to frighten any one away from Christianity? It seems hard enough when a man is not at liberty to *act* for himself; but it is harder and apparently more insufferable still, when a superior power is brought in, as it were, to prevent us from thinking, and desiring, and putting forth affection for ourselves. Yet, under this control, or, as worldly men would say, under this *servitude*, the gospel of Christ lays all who embrace it; prescribing for them a rule by which every wish and feeling, as well as every action, must be measured, and demanding an unreserved and perfect compliance with all its precepts. This is not the time for entering into any formal proof of the statement, that there is more real enjoyment, more unmixed blessedness, to be experienced in the subjection of the soul to the rules of Christ's service than in what the ungodly call their liberty, else it might be proved most easily. It may just be sufficient to observe, that there never yet was found a man who, at the close of his life, regretted that he had devoted himself to do the will of God, or alleged that he had sacrificed his happiness in *that* way; while countless multitudes, upon the other hand, have confessed, that by casting off the restraints of the divine law, and living according to the imaginations of their own heart, they have pierced themselves through with many sorrows. But these remarks are only made in passing: our concern at present is with the simple fact, that Christ's people have to aim at absolute conformity to the will of God; they are required to rest satisfied with nothing less than having their whole heart and mind and

conduct moulded into strict accordance with the requirements of God's Word. This is what all of us who sat at the Lord's table solemnly engaged to make our habitual aim. Now, here I say, Christ the good shepherd goes before the flock, leading them in the way. Unlike those teachers who bound heavy burdens, and grievous to be borne, and laid them on men's shoulders, but would not so much as touch them with one of their fingers, the Lord Jesus, our great Teacher, lays no injunction on us which He did not exemplify,—prescribes no duty which He did not practise,—calls for no sacrifice which He Himself did not make. And when He bids us look upward to the summit of that vast mount of difficulty which we have to climb, and the top of which seems lost in heaven, and tells us to gird up our loins for the ascent, and to put forth holy and persevering effort that we may reach the resting-place, He still goes first Himself, commanding us to do only what He has done before us.

It will be profitable for us, under this head, to consider for a little, *first*, what Christ made His invariable rule, both of feeling and of action; then what He set ever before Him as the end He had to attain; and then how He exercised Himself in following the rule and seeking the end. 1. As to the rule He followed in feeling and in acting. That, you know, was the Father's will. 'I came not,' He says, 'to do my own will, but the will of Him that sent me.' 'My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, and to finish His work.' 'Father, if Thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but Thine, be done.' These were the expressions of the soul of the Man Christ Jesus; and they make it obvious, that throughout the whole of His career on earth there was just one rule of life before Him—the will of His heavenly Father. To that He bowed,—whether it called Him to spend His days in toil, and His nights in prayer,—whether it led Him to reveal truth to the ignorant, to perform offices of kindness to the miserable, to worship with others in the temple, or to endure agony alone in the garden. 2. Then next, as to the end He had in view: that was the glory of the Father. 'I have glorified Thee upon earth,' He said, addressing the Father; 'I have finished the work which Thou

gavest me to do.' If He prayed that the Father might glorify the Son by giving Him a ransomed people, it was 'that thus also the Son might glorify the Father.' If He taught His followers to implore blessings in His name, it was 'that the Father might be glorified in the Son.' When He was looking forward to the decease which He had to accomplish at Jerusalem, and when the dark prospect of suffering that lay before Him pressed heavily upon His spirit, He did not shrink from the terrible conflict, because the glory of the Father was concerned in the accomplishment of His work. 'Now is my soul troubled,' He said, 'and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour. But for this cause came I to this hour. Father, glorify Thy name.' He will go forward seeking divine strength and energy to uphold the weak humanity, because the sacrifice He was about to offer would tend to glorify the Father's name. 3. And then, once more, as to the way in which He exercised Himself, in following the rule which He had prescribed for Himself, and seeking that great end which was ever in His view, we have to notice this, that His whole life was a course of what may be called cheerful renunciation of self-will. Many particulars might have been singled out and remarked upon here; but we confine ourselves to the one just mentioned, lest by specifying more we should encumber rather than simplify our subject. Perhaps, indeed, it may be thought by some, that when we say the most striking exercise of Christ's soul on earth was the cheerful renunciation of self-will, we merely express in other words what has been stated before, that He set the Father's will before Him as His rule. But there is an important distinction to be marked between the two things. One may have a rule distinctly in his view, and may feel the obligation to follow it, and may make some efforts to comply with it, while yet, if it were not from the *pressing sense* of obligation, and if he were left to obey the dictates of his own will, he would cast the rule aside. But here was the great characteristic of our Lord's obedience to the will of the Father, and of His efforts to advance the glory of the Father, that He cheerfully put Himself into the Father's hand, desiring nothing, loving nothing, and doing nothing but what was stamped with the approbation of the Father. And

now, my friends, what think ye of these things? It is a comforting truth to know that the shepherd goes before the sheep; that there is no exercise to which we are called in pursuing the path of holy obedience, in which we cannot trace the manifest impression of the Lord's footsteps; but it is ever to be remembered that if He goes before, the sheep do follow Him. Here, then, is our course marked out by that which the Saviour trod,—the will of God our rule, the glory of God our principal aim, and the renunciation of self-will our daily exercise. Oh! if we were but farther advanced in this vast attainment of renouncing self-will, and moving onward with our eye fixed upon the revealed will of Jehovah, and with hearty and strenuous effort to follow it out in all things, then would we drink more largely of the stream of pure blessedness, and step after step in our progress would our capacity for enjoying that blessedness be enlarged, until at length, the will of the creature being brought into perfect harmony with the will of the Creator, the soul would be fitted for participating in *all* the Creator's fulness. It is the Spirit's great work to effect this harmony; and just in proportion to the measure in which it is wrought in the soul of the believer, that is, in other words, just in proportion to the faithfulness with which any one follows Christ, and to the degree in which he resembles Him, in the same proportion is there a foretaste of heaven's felicity imparted to the soul on earth. Alas, then, of what unspeakable enjoyment have we hitherto deprived ourselves by our self-willedness and conformity to this evil world! Let us listen to the word addressed to us, and respond to it with cheerful effort. 'Awake, awake, put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem; shake thyself from the dust; loose thyself from the bands of thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion.' And yet, my friends, before we leave this head of discourse, it requires to be mentioned, that the sheep only *follow* the shepherd; they must always be behind Him. Let us struggle and wrestle as we may, we are still immeasurably behind our Leader. But this must not discourage us. We must ever be pressing on, remembering that there is not a successful conflict with the corruption of our own hearts, or a successful effort to bring our

will into conformity with God's, which does not carry us so much nearer the final landing-place. 'We shall know if we follow on to know the Lord.' 'Wherefore, having such encouragements before us, let us strive to cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and of the spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.'

II. But now, in the second place, I come to notice, that Christ goes before His people in the path of suffering and tribulation.

That the followers of Christ are not exempted from the common troubles of life, yea rather, that they may anticipate them, is manifest from what He Himself says : 'In the world ye shall have tribulation : but be of good cheer ; I have overcome the world.' To all the same pains and difficulties and bereavements to which the ungodly are subjected, the children of God have to submit ; and besides these, there are other kinds of trouble which are peculiar to them. The work of the Spirit which gives life to the soul, and turns all the affections and desires of the heart heavenward, places the man in whom it is begun in a position of antagonism to the world, and renders the world hostile to *him*. It is utterly impossible for any one who has been made a partaker of the Holy Ghost to approve or to countenance many of those things which the world calls lawful and good ; impossible for him in numberless cases to have community of feeling with those who are influenced by the god of this world ; impossible for him to avoid giving offence to others who take the world's maxims as their standard of action. Hence there must be opposition encountered by the friends of Christ in the prosecution of their schemes, and in their following out the dictates of their conscience,—opposition which is sometimes exquisitely painful and trying, because they are obliged to range themselves against many, perhaps, whom in other respects they love. Then, again, they cannot look at the spiritual condition of multitudes around them, of whom there are perhaps some connected with them by the ties of near relationship, without being deeply affected by the thought, that these are making shipwreck of their souls ; and just because they have been

taught to value the things that belong to their own eternal peace, they are pained at heart to behold others making light of these things. Such feeling was very strongly exhibited by the psalmist, when he said, 'Rivers of waters run from mine eyes, because they keep not Thy law.' Yes, my friends, when we survey the course of Christ's people; when we think of their inward conflicts and anxieties, and of the opposition with which they have sometimes outwardly to contend just because they are upon His side; and when, along with these things, we take the ordinary troubles of life, of which they have their share, we are constrained to feel that the path to the heavenly rest lies through the wilderness, or rather through the valley of weeping. But if there are any among us faint and weary because of the way, let such remember that the Good Shepherd is *before*. Have you, believer, had much to suffer from the reproaches, the revilings, and the enmity of the ungodly? Christ endured the contradiction of the ungodly against Himself. Have you had to weep over sinners, hardened in their iniquity, whom you would have gladly brought with you into the fold? Christ sat down over against Jerusalem, and as He beheld it the tears flowed from His eyes, because it had not known the day of merciful visitation. Have you to toil and struggle for a scanty livelihood, while others far below you, it may be, in intelligence and moral worth, are moving about in ease and plenty? Christ laboured; Christ had nowhere to lay His head; Christ bore the cross to which He was to be nailed. Have you had occasion to sit at the grave of the departed, and to mourn there for the removal of those you loved most tenderly? Christ is there also before you. See Him standing at the grave of Lazarus! Behold the emphatic words written: 'Jesus wept!' and hear what He says to comfort these poor mourners: 'I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, shall yet live again.' It is indeed a chequered life, and a life sometimes marked by scenes of extremest suffering, that is assigned to the people of God here; but surely there is comfort in the thought, that the footsteps of the shepherd are discernible in the roughest parts of the way by which the sheep are led. And should God so order it, that any of us

shall be more tried than in His providence we have hitherto been, it will tend to nerve us for the trial, that 'Such as we are, such was Christ when He was in the world.'

III. But, in the third place, I remark, that Christ goes before His people to the grave. There is something humiliating, as well as terrible, in the termination of man's earthly pilgrimage. The mind recoils from the contemplation of it. Yet, even if we contrive to shut the subject out of our thoughts, the reality cannot be averted; the end will come, with all its dismal accompaniments. Whether after long wasting disease, under which desire almost fails, and the grasshopper becomes a burden, or by a sudden stroke, without any previous warning; whether in all the vigour of active life, when the mind is full of its schemes and hopes for the future, or in feeble old age, when the powers both of mind and body have given way, and there is scarcely a friend left behind to mourn,—the end must come, and all that is mortal of man must be shut up in the narrow coffin, and consigned to the earth from which it was taken! It is a sad conclusion; and yet more sad, when we set ourselves to think that perhaps it was upon the poor mortal frame that is covered by the earth that the chief anxieties of the undying spirit that once inhabited it were expended; that what the man principally lived and cared for is now that lifeless clay which is soon to become like the dust beneath our feet! Even in the case of Christ's own people, when their work is done, and they are summoned to a better world, we cannot help connecting with their removal feelings of sadness and regret. They can do nothing more for His glory here; the tongue that spoke for Him, and the hands that laboured in His service, are now cold and motionless, and the heart that used to beat to every generous impulse is now still—all must moulder into dust! And it is not weakness in the believer, it is not incompatible with the cherishing of good hope for eternity, that his mind is solemnized by such reflections as these, and that the thought of death strikes awe into his spirit! But then, after all, how different is the position which he occupies when looking forward to this, the end of his earthly course, from that in which



the unbeliever is placed ! ‘The righteous hath hope in his death.’ Dismal and gloomy as the grave is, Christ, the good shepherd, has been there before the flock ; and they need not be afraid. ‘Come,’ said the angel to the disciples, when they went to visit the sepulchre, ‘Come, see the place where the Lord lay.’ ‘In all things it behoved Him to be made like unto His brethren ;’ and as it is their doom to be laid in the grave, so He went down thither, that they might be cheered in passing through the valley of the shadow of death. And observe, it was the place where the Lord *had lain* that the heavenly visitant pointed out to the disciples, not the place where He then was. The sepulchre was open ; there was nothing to be found in it but the linen clothes in which the body had been wrapped,—relics of mortality. The Lord Himself had come forth again, to reign as the Lord of life ; teaching His people that though, like Him, they must submit to the degradation of the grave, like Him they shall rise again in glory ! The door of their tomb will be unbarred ; their scattered dust will be collected, animated with a new life, and clothed with immortal beauty ; and they will then fully know that, if the Lord lay but short time in the sepulchre, it was that He might be still before His people, to secure for them the glory of the resurrection ! Let us comfort and encourage each other by these truths ; and when the fear of death and the grave presses heavily upon our spirit, let us remember that Christ died, and lay in the grave, and that He also rose again.

IV. In the fourth place, Christ goes before His people to the judgment.

‘We must all appear before the judgment-seat of God, to answer for the deeds done in the body.’ Now, if the thought of death, and of having our bodies consigned to the grave, is fitted to solemnize the mind, how much more the thought of meeting God in the judgment ! The soul of sinful man in the presence of Him to whom all things are naked and open, to whom the most secret intents and purposes of the whole course of mortal life are all known, and before whom they are all spread forth as if written with a sunbeam ; the issue of its

appearance there having depending upon it an endless duration either of blessedness or of wretchedness; and the rule of judgment being the holy law of God, with its demand of perfect obedience; and the inscription written above the judgment-seat being this, 'Into heaven there shall enter nothing that defileth;'—who can think of all these things without awe and trembling? And who can stand with unabashed front in that terrible scrutiny? My friends, the men who have despised salvation, and laughed at the gospel and its offers, will then find that they had been sporting with the thunderbolts of the wrath of God. One class only will stand there without alarm; and these are believers in Christ, who, by the Spirit, have been led to choose Him as the Lord their righteousness, and by the power of the same Spirit have been conformed to His likeness. These will stand in the judgment without fear; and why? Because Christ has been there before them! When He rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, He was judged in the capacity of their Head and Representative; His work wrought for their benefit was recognised and declared to be perfect; and they are accepted in Him, the Beloved. Oh, that is a blessed truth, 'There is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus.' 'Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.' Then it will be seen what is the privilege of being a Christian, a follower of Christ. Those who rejected Him in this world, and lived and died without Him, will have to appear at that awful tribunal, alone, friendless, in all their natural depravity and contracted guilt; and their doom we know. But those who believe in Him, and who have followed Him, will appear as His members, known to Him, and precious in His sight; and judgment having been already passed, and approval pronounced upon the Head, the members are partakers of the benefit, and are received into the joy of their Lord.

V. I was to speak, in the last place, of Christ as going before His people to glory.

On this topic, however, we cannot enlarge; and even did

the time permit, we would feel it difficult to enlarge upon it. Here is the declaration of the Word of truth from the lips of the good shepherd Himself: 'I go to prepare a place for you: and I will come again, and receive you to myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.' Christ has gone into heaven to make the inheritance of glory sure to His own people. And if He leads them in the path of holy obedience; if He has left His footprints, and called them to follow Him in the way of suffering and tribulation; if He has gone down to the grave, showing that they must go after Him thither too; if He has been at the judgment-seat procuring, if I may so speak, the writ for their pardon and acceptance;—all these works of His are just designed to pave the way for the concluding one, His taking them to Himself, that they may for ever be partakers of His glory. It is a vast, an inconceivable privilege, which is here: being received to the enjoyment of God Himself for ever. We would almost regard it as a dream, if we had not God's own seal affixed to it as a reality. To be told that poor sinners like us shall have a place in that world of light and blessedness, recognised as brethren by the pure spirits that surround the throne of God, yea, recognised as brethren by the Son of God Himself, and received and welcomed by the Eternal Father as His own children, is too much at first for the weak mind of man to grasp. Yet, when we think of the Son of God, the Good Shepherd, coming down into the wilderness of this world to seek the lost sheep, and having found them, taking them under His guidance, sacrificing His own life to save theirs, and going up to heaven, there to appear in their behalf, verily we feel that the future glory is a demonstrable reality, and that where the Shepherd is, thither the sheep will be permitted to follow Him, even though it be to the very throne of Jehovah Himself.

Much more might have been said on each of these heads of discourse which we have considered; but we must now draw our remarks to a close.

It was very solemn work in which we were engaged lately at the table of the Lord. We then avowed ourselves the followers of Christ. We would all, I doubt not, gladly follow

Him to glory ; but tribulation, and the grave, and the judgment, must be met before the full glory comes. Are you willing to follow Him through tribulation ; have you committed all to Him ; and do you trust Him wholly as pertains to the grave and the judgment ? And more especially, are you striving to follow hard after Him in the path of obedience, with the will of God as your rule of thought and action ? To reach the glory, we must walk in the pathway of holiness. And to get into that pathway, we must first have hold of Christ as our Saviour. Then, cleansed from guilt, and having peace with God, we shall be in the road which, through many troubles, but with ever growing purity and enjoyment, leads to the heavenly kingdom.

But let it be remembered, it is of the sheep that those things are spoken,—those who are Christ's, who believe in Him, and love Him, and surrender themselves wholly to Him. If we are not His, united to Him by living faith, we have no part nor lot in the blessings He bestows. Amen.

## XVI.

### THE WAYS AND DANGEROUS CONSEQUENCES OF VEXING THE HOLY SPIRIT.

‘But they vexed His Holy Spirit : therefore He was turned to be their enemy,  
and He fought against them.’—ISA. LXIII. 10.

**I**N the verse preceding the text, the prophet presents us with a most graphic and affecting representation of the grace and love of God toward Israel. ‘In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the angel of His presence saved them : in His love and in His pity He redeemed them ; and He bare them, and carried them all the days of old.’ Language more expressive of watchful solicitude for their well-being, and of the deepest tenderness, it would not be possible to find. As the mother is touched to the heart by the wailings of her sickly infant, so when the children of Israel sighed by reason of their bondage, and cried, their cry, we are told, came up unto God by reason of the bondage. As she would account an injury done to her helpless little one as inflicted on herself, so the Lord counted the oppression and the wrongs which Israel suffered at the hand of Pharaoh and their other enemies as practised against Himself, and visited them with punishment accordingly. As she, influenced by the all-engrossing love that thinks of nothing but its object, would run to snatch her babe from an impending danger, and hasten with it to a place of safety ; so the Lord in love and pity redeemed Israel from their bondage, that He might settle them in the promised rest. And as she, travelling with her child in a rugged and toilsome road, would forget her own weariness, and carry it in her arms, heedless of the burden ; so the Lord, in taking His people through the wilderness to Canaan, bare them, and carried them all the days of old. Never had there been witnessed

before such wonderful displays of combined power and goodness as were exhibited toward the seed of Abraham during their journey from Egypt to Canaan; never such forbearance as was manifested toward them by Him who is emphatically called the Holy One of Israel; never such remarkable interpositions of providence as were shown in the supply of their temporal wants, and the multiplying of their temporal comforts; and never before such a continued communication kept up between heaven and earth as was maintained, that they might be fully instructed in the will of God, and brought into the way of peace and life. And what, then, was the effect of all this marvellous dealing of God toward them, for the advancement of their present and future good? Alas, we have it, briefly indeed, but too truly, given in the text: 'They rebelled, and vexed His Holy Spirit.' 'The Lord God of their fathers,' we read, 2 Chron., 'sent to them by His messengers, rising up early, and sending; because He had compassion on His people, and on His dwelling-place: but they mocked the messengers of God, and despised His words, and misused His prophets.' Then compassion and forbearance were exhausted. 'The wrath of the Lord,' it is said, 'arose against His people, till there was no remedy;' or, as it is expressed in the text, 'Therefore He was turned to be their enemy, and He fought against them.' There can be little doubt, that although the ingratitude of the Israelites for their temporal privileges, and their flagrant abuse of them, were comprehended under the rebellion and the vexing of the Holy Spirit with which the prophet here charges them; yet the sins which are more especially marked out by these emphatic terms are those which we find enumerated in the passage quoted from 2 Chronicles—their mocking the messengers of the Lord, despising His words, and misusing His prophets. For it was a direct act of rebellion to pour contempt upon the messages which God sent, and upon those who brought them, and to follow their own courses in defiance of the threatenings which accompanied these messages in case of disobedience. It is unnecessary to remark at any length, that when the Spirit is said to have been vexed, this does not imply that any such feeling can ruffle the divine mind as sometimes agitates the breast of a man, when his en-

deavours to promote the best interests of others are treated with contempt or turned into ridicule. But what we are to understand by the expression is, that when the means the Spirit uses to bring sinners into subjection to the will of God are made light of by them,—when they rebel more and more, instead of being subdued,—or when they remain in a state of indifference, then His mode of dealing toward them is changed; and of this change we have something like an image in the altered conduct of one man toward another who has caused him deep vexation of spirit. The change is described in the text in language well fitted to solemnize our minds: ‘They rebelled, and vexed His Holy Spirit: therefore He was turned to be their enemy, and He fought against them.’ Now, my friends, from this text we may, by the blessing of God, derive instruction that is both needful and important. We have selected it as furnishing us with an opportunity of directing your attention to some questions of vital moment, which affect us as a congregation of Christ’s professed followers. It was of those who were called the people of God, you perceive, that the prophet spoke, when he said, ‘They vexed His Holy Spirit;’ and although their provocations turned Him to be their enemy, so that He fought against them, yet He did not forsake them utterly. For we read in the very next verse, ‘Then He remembered the days of old, Moses, and His people.’ We must take the language of the text, therefore, as descriptive, not of those who had lost all claim to be regarded as the worshippers of Jehovah, and who had sunk so deep in depravity and wickedness as to render any hope of their being recovered almost vain, but of those whom the Lord had not utterly left to themselves, who still retained the name of His servants, and laid claim to their privileges. And so, when thus understood, the text may be applied, with all suitableness, to us who are here assembled; among whom—while we trust that there are not a few who have been quickened by the Holy Spirit, who know what it is to have peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ, and in whose hearts the love of God has been shed abroad by the Spirit—there are, it is to be feared, many who are Christians only in name; many whose once fair and promising profession may

have degenerated into a lifeless formality ; many who are in no respect different from the veriest worldlings, except that they have not altogether forsaken the outward worship of God ; and many also, alas, who have gone far out of the way, although their backsliding may not have been openly apparent, consisting rather in the alienation of the heart from God than in any glaring dereliction of duty, or open transgression of the moral law. And surely, my friends, if this description presents us with anything like a faithful picture of our spiritual condition as a congregation, we cannot but feel that the sin of Israel may be charged against us—that we vex the Holy Spirit, and provoke Him to be our enemy, and to contend against us. But this is not all. When we look away from those who have only the form of godliness, and examine narrowly the state of such as in the judgment of charity must be accounted true disciples, we often perceive so much imperfection in them, so many strange inconsistencies, so much of the spirit of worldliness, and so little of that earnestness about eternal things, that devotedness to the will of Christ, that zeal for His glory, that persevering exertion to commend His truth to others, and to promote the spiritual and temporal interests of mankind ;—in a word, we perceive so much of what is earthly still cleaving even to many who exhibit some of the marks of having been born from above, that in speaking from such a text as the present, we feel as if we could not be charged with exaggeration when we apply the words to all classes, and regard them as reading a salutary and profitable lesson to all : ‘ They vexed His Holy Spirit : therefore He was turned to be their enemy, and He fought against them.’ Let us then proceed to consider these words more particularly. They lead us naturally to point out, in the first place, some of the ways in which men may be said to vex the Holy Spirit ; and, in the second place, the dangerous consequences of so doing. If the time permit, the subject will afford ample scope for practical application.

I. In the first place, then, let us consider some of the ways in which men may be said to vex the Holy Spirit. But that we may have the more distinct apprehension of this part of



the subject generally, we must carry along with us a clear perception of the office and work of the Holy Spirit under the covenant of grace. While the Scripture, then, reveals the Son of God as undertaking to obey, to the fullest extent in which obedience could be claimed, the law of God, which guilty man had dishonoured, and to pay the Church's ransom, by giving His life for her, that He might be empowered to present her to the Father and to Himself a glorious Church, holy and without blemish; and while it teaches us, that having, under the humble name of the Man Christ Jesus, but really as Immanuel—God in our nature—accomplished all this, and wrought out the redemption of the Church, He then ascended up on high to appear as the intercessor for His people, and to secure their reception into the mansions prepared for them from the foundation of the world;—while the Scripture reveals these precious truths, and urges our hearty assent to them, that we may be saved, it also teaches us that, with the ascension of Christ into heaven, there commenced a new era in the Church's spiritual history,—one great end of His ascension being that 'He might receive gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them.' God had indeed dwelt among them while the Word made flesh sojourned upon earth; and those whom Christ admitted to His confidence had beheld the glory of the Father, shining through the veil of humanity which He had assumed. But the prophetic words which have just been quoted, plainly intimate that the withdrawal of Christ's personal presence from the Church was only a preparatory step toward God's dwelling among men again, with such manifestations of His power and presence as had not before been given. And such was the reality. For when Christ ascended on high, He sent down the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, who dwells with every child of God, however far he may be separated from his brethren; whose presence is not confined, as Christ's was, to one place, but pervades the universal Church, and is evidenced by the quickening, enlightening, and purifying grace which He imparts. Now, the office of the Spirit—who, since the day of Pentecost, has, if we may so speak, supplied the place of Christ in the Church—is generally to apply to sinners the benefits of Christ's purchase;

to convince the world of sin, and righteousness, and judgment ; to take of the things that are Christ's and reveal them to the soul ;—in a word, not merely to bring perishing sinners within the reach of life, but to impart life to them, and qualify them for the enjoyment of God. In the execution of this office, the Spirit employs a twofold agency. He works by visible instruments and means ; and He works inwardly by the immediate putting forth of His own divine energy. Both modes of operation are for the same end—the conviction and conversion of sinners, and the sanctification of believers. The ordinary means and instruments by which the work of the Spirit is conducted are, as you know, the divine Word, which is called the sword of the Spirit ; the ordinances of grace ; and among these more prominently, the sacraments and prayer. The inward agency, again, we cannot so well define, because we know not how one spirit acts upon another, but the fact we are fully informed of. For instance, Christ said to the apostles that the Spirit would bring all things to their remembrance which they had heard of Him : here is an immediate divine influence exerted upon the memory. We read elsewhere, that while the things of God are hidden from the carnal mind, the Spirit reveals them to those who are born of God, so that they *know* the things which are freely given to them of God : here is an immediate effect wrought upon the understanding, so that truth which could not be apprehended before becomes clear and palpable. Again, we read of the Spirit shedding the love of God abroad in the heart : here, then, is an immediate change wrought upon the affections,—an object of love discovered and rejoiced in that was unknown before. And once more, the Lord is said to make His people willing in the day of His power, to put His Spirit within them, and cause them to walk in His statutes and keep His judgments : here, then, is an immediate influence exercised upon the will, so that, with all cheerfulness and submission, the soul bows to the divine requirements, and counts them holy and just and good. In whatever mysterious way, therefore, the divine Agent accomplishes these vast changes, the fact cannot be questioned that they are accomplished ; that while there is an outward agency employed for

enlarging, and building up, and beautifying the Church of the living God, there is also an inward spiritual agency, by which it is made effectual. Now, from these remarks, we shall be enabled to see more clearly, and, for practical purposes, to illustrate more effectively, some of the ways in which men may be said to vex the Holy Spirit.

1. I remark then, first, that this sin is committed, when the all-important *office* executed by the Spirit in the Church, as sent by Christ to quicken, convert, and sanctify the soul, is not duly recognised and honoured. If we attribute to human means and human power what Holy Scripture asserts to be the fruit of the Spirit's operation, or if we even overlook the fact that without His operation the soul can never be raised from the grave of spiritual corruption to the life of righteousness and holiness, we throw contempt upon His work, or treat it with indifference; and this, in the figurative language of the Bible, is to vex Him. When rightly considered indeed, it is a sin of fearful magnitude. A glance at the following well-known passage will illustrate this sufficiently. The apostle says, 'God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.' Here, you observe, the two great works of God are compared together, and the one is illustrated by the other. The natural creation is referred to as furnishing us with an image of what is effected in the spiritual creation. Before God said, Let there be light, the matter of which the earth is composed was without form and void. And so, before the sinner is made the subject of divine operations, his soul is dark, corrupt, unsightly. But when the light, at the divine mandate, burst forth, then was the whole face of nature changed; order and beauty wrapt their fair mantle over the dark chaos, and, hiding it, exhibited in its stead the workmanship of infinite power, and wisdom, and goodness. And so, when the Spirit shines into the soul, a similar transformation is effected. The man that was sometime darkness, now becomes light in the Lord; and where corruption reigned without resistance, purity begins to be enthroned. Such, then, is the analogy between the two creations; the agency being divine in both, but peculiarly the

Spirit's in the second. And now suppose that a poor weak mortal, fancying himself wise, walks forth among the works of God, is brought in contact at every step with new proofs of wise design, and with evidences of unbounded benevolence, and yet returns from the survey denying that what he has seen is the work of a *Creator*, and asserting that all can be accounted for by the operation of certain laws that are inherent in matter from the very constitution of it; must not the displeasure of the Supreme rest upon that wretched creature, who thus denies Him to His face? And what shall we say, when men are found, after surveying the Church of Christ, and beholding in one instance childlike faith where there was once hardened unbelief, disinterested love where there was envy and malignity before, gladdening hope where all before was doubt and fear, and holy principles embodied in holy acting where the life formerly was framed according to the course of this world,—what shall we say, I repeat, when, after beholding all this, men will affirm that it is no special work of the Spirit after all, but merely the result of the natural faculties directed rightly? Is not such speech, denying the operation of the Spirit in the Church, akin to that which denies the work of God in the world? And if anything can be said to vex the Holy Spirit, may not this be so spoken of, and must it not draw down the tokens of His displeasure? Now, my friends, let us consider for a moment how these remarks affect some among ourselves. There may perhaps be none of us—I trust there is not one—who will expressly deny the necessity of the Holy Spirit's immediate agency in the conversion and sanctification of the soul. But what, let me ask, is the difference practically, if we *do not feel* our need of His agency, and do not with earnestness implore it? If there are any of us—and it is to be feared there are some—who cherish a vague hope that they will reach heaven at last, and who, at the same time, never experience any anxiety with reference to the question, whether or not they have received the Holy Ghost; does not this habitual disregard of the divine Agent indicate a state of mind very nearly allied to that which openly denies the necessity of His operations? And if a friend who felt an interest in our well-

being, and to whom we lay under manifold obligations, would certainly be vexed if he were told that we never once thought or spoke of him, so, according to the figure employed in the text, we may be said to vex the Holy Spirit, when His office and His work attract our regard and engage our prayers no more than if His work were not a reality, and His office were not indispensable to the soul's very life. And let me add here, that even the people of God themselves are not without sin in this matter. They do not carry about with them a vivid enough impression of their entire dependence upon the Spirit's grace; they do not magnify His work as they often have opportunity to do; they are not careful, as they should be, to remind perplexed inquirers after salvation, that as no man can come to the Father but by the Son, so it is the office of the Spirit to draw them to the Son, that He, taking them by the hand, may present them to the Father for acceptance. In these, and many other ways, they fail to honour Him; and when He is not honoured, the sin referred to in the text is committed, which cannot be a light one, when it is called 'a vexing of the Holy Spirit.'

2. In the second place, I remark, that the sin of vexing the Spirit is committed, when the means and instruments by which He carries on His work are despised or abused.

This topic might have been subdivided into many particulars; but as some other points require yet to be stated, we shall endeavour to embrace all these particulars under the general head that has just been given. The Spirit, then, communicates with us through the Word, and other divine ordinances; and, on the other hand, we communicate with Him in the same way, and have the means of so doing most fully placed within our reach, by the Word and prayer. The Word is as a letter sent to us by a friend, full of kindly expressions, containing the most precious information, and also the most affectionate warnings,—all needful and salutary. Prayer is in part the answer we return to this letter, the carrying on of the correspondence which has been opened up with us from heaven. Then what would be the feeling of any one whom we professed to love and reverence, and who was entitled to our love and reverence, and to our compliance with his

minutest wishes, if, when he wrote to us with warm affection, and with most anxious solicitude for our well-being, we should cast his letter aside, without even reading it, or should glance it over with indifference, not wasting a thought upon its contents, or seeking to answer it; or, if we did answer it at all, answering it in such form as to show that we counted the task very burdensome, and that we did not value the correspondence? Would he not feel vexation of spirit at our cold neglect or unpardonable indifference; and would he not be justified in showing some marks of his displeasure at our insulting conduct toward him? What an awfully criminal aspect, then, does the conduct of those assume, who suffer the divine Word to lie beside them from week to week unread, or who, when they open it, hurry through their stated portion, as if their only anxiety were, not to learn, but to get their task concluded; and who, as to the matter of prayer, either bow not the knee at all, or merely utter a certain form of words, which they learnt perhaps in infancy? Could there be a more appropriate expression used to denote the criminality of such procedure, than when it is called 'a vexing of the Spirit of the Lord'? Look for a moment more particularly at this subject. The chief design of the Spirit in the Word is to reveal Christ, that sinners may be saved by Him. He not only teaches us how the Lord Jesus wrought out the redemption of the Church, and satisfies us by every possible argument that the redemption is complete, and beseeches us to come and partake of it; but, besides this, He draws aside the curtain that hides futurity from the view of man, and, on the one hand, shows us in the dark gulf beneath, where there is weeping and wailing and endless woe, what will be the destiny of those who despise the riches of the grace of God, and thrust the offered Saviour away from them, and, on the other hand, in those blissful regions where God dwells among the redeemed, and makes them glad with the joy of His countenance, what will be the unfading inheritance of all who embrace Christ, and love Him;—and all this He does to draw us to Christ, that we may have life. And what earnestness there is on the Spirit's part to commend the Saviour to sinners, and to excite them to receive Him! 'How long,' He says, 'ye

simple ones, will ye love simplicity, and the scorers delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge? Turn you at my reproof.' But alas, in the case of vast multitudes, this demonstration of divine love and earnestness is altogether unheeded. Neither does the beauty of Christ attract, nor the sense of danger drive those thoughtless sinners toward Him. They turn, one to his farm, another to his merchandise, another to his pleasures, another to his sinful indulgences; and is it wonderful that the Scripture, seeking to impress upon us the guilt of such a course, should term it 'a vexing of the Holy Spirit'? And here, as under the previous head, there is something for the people of God themselves to learn. It cannot, indeed, be said that they reject Christ, for they have already received Him; but sometimes they read with strange coldness of heart what the Spirit has written concerning Him, and easily are their minds diverted from that which should be to them an exercise fraught with enjoyment. And yet more especially with respect to prayer, they are often in a great trespass. They believe that the Spirit alone can teach them to pray acceptably; they make it their request that He may be given to them as a Spirit of grace and supplication; but then, after they have prayed, are they always careful to watch for the answer? And if they are not, can they return to give thanks, as is becoming? My friends, if it be one of the Spirit's great works to help our infirmities in prayer; if we profess to cast ourselves upon His help, as not knowing what to pray for of ourselves; and if we make it our request that some special blessings be bestowed upon us, as more grace, more love, more heavenly-mindedness; then surely if we think no more of the prayer after it has once been offered up, if we observe not whether our requests have been granted, then we dishonour the Spirit, by making light of that assistance which, with our lips, we besought Him to give us. For if we valued His assistance, we would mark well the good it brought to us, and be thankful for it. Wherefore, my friends, 'let us watch unto prayer, and continue in the same with thanksgiving.'

3. In the third place, I remark, that the sin of vexing the Spirit is committed by the *unwarrantable* doubts and fears which sometimes depress the minds of the people of God.

This statement might have been made broader, so as to include the sin of unbelief, which, considering all the evidence that can be adduced to prove that the Scriptures were written by inspiration of the Spirit, and that Jesus Christ is the Son of God and the Saviour of sinners, is indeed a sin of deepest dye, and most dishonouring to the Holy Ghost. But without stopping to advert particularly to this point, which the time would scarcely admit, I shall confine myself to those doubts and fears by which serious inquirers after God are sometimes painfully exercised; and which cannot so properly be called the fruit of unbelief, as the result of a weak and wavering faith. Then, my friends, if we saw a man, whom we had done everything in our power to render comfortable, and within whose reach we had actually placed all the means of enjoyment which he could well desire, still complaining and still unhappy; if, the more we professed our willingness to serve him, and remove all the inconveniences of his lot, he should persist in calling in question our sincerity; if he should say, I am so unworthy of your kindness that I cannot believe you will continue it, while we assured him that it would never be withdrawn; if he were always downcast and gloomy and full of apprehension, and would neither take our word nor our solemn asseveration, nor even our written and signed and sealed agreement, fully to provide for him,—would not all patience at length be exhausted, and would we not be justified in leaving him for a season to himself, to brood over his imaginary misery? Then somewhat analogous to this is the case of those who will not be persuaded to come and partake fully of the comforts of the gospel. They are always doubting, always afraid. There is rich provision made for God's children in the Word, but they say it is not for *them*. There is a full revelation given of the divine love, but they are afraid they can have no interest in it. They have already experienced much of God's goodness; but they cannot expect it will be continued, and in the end they fear they will be lost. There is not indeed any possible view they can give of their case which is not met by something in the Scripture that would cheer them, if they would only broadly look at it, and remember who has put it there. The widest invitations,



and these addressed to sinners of every class ; the most gracious promises, embodying everything that heart can desire ; the very oath of Jehovah pledged for the salvation of every one who believes on the name of His Son ; a covenant sealed and ratified, securing life for all who will take hold of it ;—all these things, together with such a multitude of diversified examples, to prove their efficacy, and their adaptation to every imaginable case, are exhibited to the victim of doubts and fears ; and yet sometimes without effect. This, then, we say, is dishonouring to the Spirit, for He would have His word thoroughly tried and implicitly relied upon. It is dishonouring to Him, because He would have His people joyful, and exhorts them in places without number to rejoice in the Lord ; but these persons live as if He had no joy to impart, and as if His word only excited inquietudes which it had not power to allay. O my friends, let me beseech you to place confidence in that faithful word, and no longer to droop under the bondage of servile fear, as if the blood of Christ could not wash away even your sin, and as if the Spirit could not cleanse you from your defilement. ‘Awake, awake ; shake thyself from the dust ; arise, O Jerusalem : loose thyself from the bands of thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion.’

4. In the fourth place, I remark, that the sin of vexing the Holy Spirit is committed, when any good motions or purposes which He excites in the heart are suppressed, or not followed out.

Sometimes a man, in providence, is unexpectedly set down where he hears divine things seriously spoken of, and for the time he is arrested. Some of the things said awaken new feelings within him, and make him wish that he had some experience of the favour of God, and that he were better prepared for the eternal state. That is a good wish,—evidently not altogether of earthly origin,—and to what blessed consequences might it not lead, if it were framed into earnest prayer, and steadily kept before the mind ! Or again, a man in the course, it may be, of careless reading, lights upon a chapter of the Word, in which there is some truth that fastens itself upon his mind with a tenacity that will not let go its hold. He is constrained to ponder that truth. When he is

in the midst of business, it will set itself full before him. It will even haunt him on his bed. The bearing of that truth may be to the effect that vengeance will overtake the sinner; that death comes, and after death the judgment. Now, if, under the influence which such a truth exerts, he were led seriously to consider his own condition as a sinner, and to feel his need of Christ, how wonderful, how blessed the issue! Or again, in like manner, under the preaching of the gospel, or through affecting dispensations of divine providence, there may be excited in the mind the conviction that all is not safe, that the life has been spent in vanity and sin, and that the end of these things is death. And how often such convictions have been the very turning-point of a man's spiritual history,—the very commencement of a new life to him,—experience fully testifies. Well, my friends, there are multitudes who have been visited times innumerable with such convictions, but who have always struggled against them and driven them away, and who are now therefore, as respects eternity, in a more hopeless state than ever. Alas! they have resisted these common operations of the Holy Ghost, as they are called; they have provoked Him to leave them to themselves; they have loved darkness rather than the light; and is it wonderful that their end should be darkness? Let not this be our sin; for the Lord hath said that His Spirit shall not always strive with man.

5. In the fifth place, I might remark, that the sin of vexing the Holy Spirit is committed, when the grace and energy which He imparts are not actively and faithfully exercised.

There is a boundless field of duty spread forth before the view of the followers of Christ. Numberless are the opportunities they have of labouring for Him, of honouring the Spirit by showing how He makes His grace sufficient for all the emergencies of the frail creature, and of promoting the highest interests of mankind. Accordingly, their habitual prayer is that the Spirit would equip them for their work, and perfect His strength in their weakness. But when some season arrives calling for peculiar activity,—and it may be, at the same time, for some peculiar sacrifice,—then imaginary

difficulties are conjured up; the carnal love of ease pleads for indulgence; such an undertaking is too great for them, —others will be found better qualified. Can such procedure be called by any other name than ‘a vexing of the Spirit,’ whether it have reference to matters of moment, or to duties of a more ordinary kind? Have not these people prayed for grace and strength; and is not their prayer little better than a mockery, if, when the time comes for their exerting what they seemed so earnestly to pray for, they fold their hands and pretend that they cannot accomplish it? Verily it is not surprising that in such cases the Spirit should be provoked to withdraw comfort and joy from the souls of those who stand aloof from the work to which He calls them, for which they have implored Him to strengthen them, and for which He has also promised to qualify them. Thus, then, we have considered some of the ways in which the sin of vexing the Holy Spirit is committed. Very many other particulars might have been mentioned, and will readily suggest themselves to your minds. The sin is an awful one, as the very words which describe it imply. And there is one passage in the New Testament that also represents it in a fearful light. When the Apostle Paul enumerates the sins of the man who, dying in impenitence, shall be subjected to punishment which language cannot picture, he winds up the terrible climax thus: ‘Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?’

II. But we must now glance for a few moments, in conclusion, at the dangerous consequences of vexing the Holy Spirit. Some of these have of necessity been partially alluded to in the remarks already made; but others might be specified, if the time permitted. In the text the language used with reference to this subject is very strong: ‘They vexed His Holy Spirit: therefore He was turned to be their enemy, and He fought against them.’ As the sin committed is described in figurative terms, so also is the punishment of it. And therefore, if we would form a clear conception of what is im-

plied by the words of the prophet in the text, we must consider what would be the results of the Spirit's turning against any one. First, then, this evidently would be one result of it: His withdrawing altogether the instruments and means and opportunities of grace which men have despised or abused; and, as they sought not to arrive at the knowledge of the truth, leaving them to perish in the darkness which they have loved. This was His mode of dealing with the seven churches in Asia, whose light was extinguished altogether, because they would not listen to Him and repent. And, my friends, it amounts to the same thing here, whether the external channels through which grace is ordinarily communicated be entirely stopt up, or the understandings of men become so blinded, and their hearts so hardened, that they do not see the value of them, nor care to have recourse to them. The man will perish in the abyss who recklessly shuts his eyes, as well as he who travels in the dark without a guide.

But second, *again*, another thing obviously implied in the Spirit's turning against any one, is His ceasing to work and to make the means of grace effectual for conviction and conversion. And it is this particular that I would especially desire for a moment to press upon your attention. The Spirit, my friends, is against us as a congregation, if there are few, if any, serious inquirers in the midst of us, when our Sabbaths pass away without leaving one conviction graven upon the heart of sinners who are perishing, or one elevating and heavenly desire for closer communion with God. The Spirit is against us, if with great apparent respect for outward ordinances there is no fruit of the Word manifest among us, in humbling the proud, in strengthening the weak, in comforting the mourner, in making all pant for greater conformity to the image of the Son of God; if men retire from worship in no respect changed from what they were, having yielded only a formal and lifeless service. The Spirit is against us, if there is no shaking among the dry bones, no imparting of life to the dead. True, indeed, there may be all the outward and needful framework of a Christian society; the Lord's praises may be celebrated in swelling and imposing strains; prayer may be offered up, confession made, and mercy and grace implored;

the truth of the Word may be proclaimed, and the whole aspect of the worshippers may be respectful and devout; but what of all this, if souls are not converted? The temple that was reared in Zion was as fair a fabric as the world ever beheld; within and without it was adorned with all that is most precious, so that it could be called the beauty of all the land. But what would the material beauty have availed, if the sacred fire had not burnt upon the altar, if the golden lamps had not diffused their holy light, and, best of all, if the glory of the divine presence had not there been manifested? And so, what is the church, which should be the spiritual temple of Christ, if His Spirit is not there, and if the faith and love which are the sure evidences of His presence are not burning and shining there? What is it, however fair without, but a sepulchre of the dead? Then, my friends, it becomes a solemn question, What is our spiritual state before God? How many of us have been touched by the life-giving Spirit, and converted to God? We sometimes tremble when we think of these questions, looking on the state of the Church at large; for we cannot conceal it from ourselves, that while there are some cheering symptoms from time to time afforded, that the Church has not been utterly forsaken by the Spirit, they are yet so few that the hearts of God's faithful people cannot but be discouraged. But where, then, is the remedy? The sin that provokes the Spirit to withdraw Himself suggests the remedy. Let the Spirit's office be honoured, let the means of grace be prized and *prayerfully* waited on, let the truths of the Word be received with full and unsuspecting confidence, let the motions of the Spirit in the soul be followed out, and let every energy be put forth to work the work to which Providence calls and for which grace strengthens, and the tokens of the Spirit's working and of His love will not be withheld. The topics which have come under our review may not be unsuitable, as furnishing subjects of meditation in connection with the solemn work in which ye are so soon to be engaged. The Lord's table is again to be spread among you, and ye have been invited to the festival. Blessings most precious are to be dispensed, blessings which are peculiarly fitted to gladden and to strengthen the soul. To those who have embraced

Christ Jesus the Lord, and through Him have obtained reconciliation with God, the bread and wine are the seal of that covenant by which pardon and favour and life are sealed to them. To those who come hungering and thirsting after enlarged discoveries of the Redeemer's grace and love, the bread and wine form one most precious medium through which these discoveries are made; for they bring most vividly before us the mystery of the incarnation of the Eternal Word, and the whole scene of His sufferings and death, and point onward also to the glory of His second coming. But then it is only by the ministration of the Spirit that the communion elements reveal Christ savingly to the soul; and it is only to those who, by the same Spirit, have been brought to believe in the Son of God that the revelation is made. Then, if you would see the King in His beauty, if you would be admitted to the secrets of His mercy and grace and love, you must seek and have the quickening Spirit. Let there be earnest pleading for His presence, and He will come down as rain on the mown grass, as showers that water the earth. Amen.

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## XVII.

### CHRIST TO THE BELIEVER THE END OF THE LAW FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS.

‘Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.’

—ROM. x. 4.

IN a former discourse upon this text, I endeavoured to fasten this truth principally upon your minds, that all the attempts of men to establish a claim to acceptance with God on the ground of personal righteousness are utterly vain, and must in the end prove ruinous to themselves. This conclusion we found ourselves constrained to adopt and urge upon your serious consideration by these two scriptural arguments: *First*, That the divine law demands a perfect compliance with all its precepts, in thought and feeling, as well as in action,—which compliance no man can render; and *secondly*, That mercy being unknown to the law from its very nature, the sentence which it issues against disobedience cannot but take effect: ‘The soul that sinneth, it shall die.’ These truths we were desirous to fix upon the consciences of all, in order that we might obtain a more ready hearing for the great doctrine contained in the text, that ‘Christ is the end of the law for righteousness.’ The obvious import of this expression is, that every claim which the law has or can have in the way of obedience, Christ has satisfied. It could exact nothing more from Him than He gave it; and so it had its *full end* in Him, in respect to all its demands. ‘He fulfilled all righteousness.’ But besides this, He suffered and died although He was personally guiltless; which would have been altogether inconsistent, both with the rectitude of the law and the justice of the Lawgiver, if He had been dealt with as an individual, and not as the Covenant Head and Surety of

His people. For the promise of the law was life as the reward of obedience ; and the holy God could not but be well-pleased with Him who in every point had fulfilled His will. Suffering and death were the declared consequences of transgression ; and so they could not have reached Christ if He had appeared and acted merely for Himself. But the Scripture tells us that ‘ He suffered, the just in the room of the unjust ;’ and thus the law had its *full end* in Him, in respect to the exaction of the punishment which it threatened for disobedience. Christ, then, is in every sense ‘ the end of the law for righteousness,’ having yielded it all the satisfaction it could demand in the way of obedience to its precepts, and having suffered in the room of others the full penalty which it denounced for the violation of its precepts. While every child of Adam who measures himself by the law must put his hand upon his mouth, and be silent, as guilty before God, it is the law, on the other hand, that is put to silence when its claims are measured by what Christ did and suffered. And then, further, it was with His own free consent that the Son of God, by His assumption of the human nature, put Himself under the power of the law, so as to be subject to it, both for obedience and for punishment. We are *by nature* subject to it ; and cannot shake ourselves free, if we would, from the obligation to render it a full obedience, and from the sentence which must take effect in consequence of disobedience. Not being able to fulfil the *end* of the law in the way of acting up to all its precepts, it must take end upon us, whether we will or not, in the way of exacting its awful penalty. But Christ, on the other hand, who was bound by no necessity of nature, consented to act up to all its precepts, as His people’s substitute, and to endure the penalty in their stead. This great work, a work which no mere creature even of the highest order could have possibly performed, He fully accomplished ; so that He could say, ‘ It is finished ;’ and thus He is emphatically ‘ the end of the law for righteousness,’ and as such is offered to sinners in the gospel. My friends, you all need a perfect righteousness. Nothing less will satisfy the law. But where are you to find it ? Not in yourselves certainly. For *one* evil thought, one forbidden desire, cherished and indulged in the heart, even if it



break not forth in any irregularity of life, places you among the guilty ; and every day, as you must be conscious to yourselves, you lie under the charge of indulging many such thoughts and desires. One act of sin, however trivial it may be in the estimation of men, is a breach of the law, and exposes you to the curse which the law pronounces against such as continue not in all things that are commanded by it ; and not a day passes without your committing many such acts. The righteousness you need, then, is not in yourselves ; and where are you to find it ? Should you set forth in quest of it, among the children of men you cannot obtain it ; for no man can redeem his own soul, far less the soul of his brother, from destruction. In heaven there is righteousness, for along with *judgment* it is declared to be the habitation of God's throne. But when you begin to contemplate the essential righteousness of Jehovah, the more full and vivid your conception of it becomes, the more awfully overwhelming must become your conviction that your case is hopeless. It is that very righteousness of the supreme Lawgiver which stamps upon the law all its terrors, and which sweeps away all those vain anticipations which men would build upon the *general mercy* of God. Search the whole universe, and you will not find a righteousness which is available for you, either as bringing safety or comfort, until you come to Christ, who, in the language of Scripture, hath 'brought in an everlasting righteousness.' As the prophet Isaiah expresses it, 'The work of righteousness is peace ; and the effect of righteousness is quietness and assurance for ever.' Do you not feel that you could stand without alarm in the presence of the sovereign Judge, if the law had no claim upon you ? Then, in the righteousness of Christ there is not spot or wrinkle ; and He offers the full benefit of it to sinners, saying, 'Hearken unto me, ye stout-hearted, that are far from righteousness : I bring near my righteousness ; it shall not be far off, and my salvation shall not tarry.' What blessedness, if we could only say in the spirit of faith, 'Surely in the Lord have I righteousness and strength : I will trust, and not be afraid : for the Lord Jehovah is my strength and my song ; He also is become my salvation !' The points I would consider at present are these

two: Who those are to whom Christ is the end of the law for righteousness; and then, *How* it is that the parties here described *have* Christ as the end of the law for righteousness to them.

I. In the first place, then, Who are those to whom Christ is the end of the law for righteousness? The text answers the question by saying, 'To every one that believeth.' I need scarcely state that the same form of expression pervades the Word of God. Take one example: 1st chapter of Romans, the apostle says: 'I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.' And again, on the other hand, as numerous and plain are the passages which teach us that all who do not believe are excluded from the benefits which Christ has purchased. Take the two following: 'He that believeth on Him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God;' and, 'He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself; but he that believeth not God hath made Him a liar, because he believeth not the record which God gave of His Son.' No statements could be more explicit than these; and if nothing more were necessary than the mere exhibition of the truth as it is set forth in the Scripture, we might consider this part of our subject as sufficiently illustrated by the passages which have just been quoted. The simplest reader of the divine record might at once perceive from these passages, that those only who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ can be partakers of the privilege implied in their having Christ as *the end of the law* for righteousness to them; and that those who do not believe in Him have to answer all the law's demands, each one for *himself personally*. But unhappily the truth here, as in other cases, has been obscured and perverted by the devices of men; so that, for the defence of it, and to guard you against being misled by prevailing errors, I must at present enter somewhat more into argument than is desirable. The expression used in the text, you will perceive, is very general. 'Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.' And these words

obviously appear to limit the blessings of Christ's purchase to one particular class, viz. those who believe. But the question then naturally arises, What is it that we are required to believe in order to our attaining these blessings? or, in other words, *what is the object of saving faith?* The doctrine which we hold on this subject, and which we are prepared to prove the Scripture teaches, is, that the object of faith is *the whole word* of God, which we believe to be true because it is the word of God. And inasmuch as the Word throughout points to Christ as the only Saviour of sinners, the principal act of faith is the receiving of Christ and placing confidence in Him, as able and willing to deliver sinners from the wrath to come, and to bestow upon them eternal life. Or more briefly, *the object* of faith is 'the testimony which God hath *given in His word concerning* His Son,' that He is the only propitiation for sin, and that all who receive and rest upon Him as such will not perish, but have everlasting life. This is substantially the form in which the Spirit presents the doctrine to us, when He tells us by the apostle, 'It is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.' If then any sinner, weighed down by the consciousness of guilt, and feeling that there is no hope of mercy for him by the law, comes to us with the all-important question, How am I to escape from this awful condemnation and wrath to which I am exposed? what else can we do than place Christ before him, as the Scripture places Him before ourselves? What can we do but endeavour to show how there is everything in Christ to meet the wants and difficulties of that poor sinner's condition; how, moved by compassion for those who had ruined and undone themselves, He came to seek and to save the lost; how, by His obedience unto death, He fulfilled the covenant, and satisfied all the claims of the law in the stead of those whom the Father had given unto Him; and how, having risen from the dead, he is exalted as a Prince and a Saviour, to give repentance and remission of sins? And then, when we have thus preached Christ as the sinner's only refuge and only hope, what can we further do than press Him upon his acceptance, and tell him that this is the *commandment* of God, that he should believe in Jesus Christ His

Son ; and this is the gospel message, that by believing in Him, he will be delivered from wrath, and raised to the enjoyment of endless life and blessedness ? Such is the mode in which we would feel ourselves warranted to deal with any sin-troubled conscience ; and we could only sum up our statement with the solemn warning, that if the sinner refuses to accept and to place confidence in the offered Saviour, he must lie under the wrath which naturally is his portion, since there is no other sacrifice for sin than that which Christ has already presented, even the sacrifice of Himself. And it was in this way that the apostles of our Lord acted when they went forth to execute the commission which their Master had given them. Thus, when Paul went among the Corinthians, he tells us that he determined to know nothing among them save ‘ Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.’ When he went to Philippi, he carried with him the same doctrine. ‘ Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved,’ was his language to the jailor, when he lay at his feet, trembling lest the wrath of God should instantly descend upon him. And *universally*, for we need not multiply examples, the great theme of apostolic preaching was Christ as having died for sinners, and having risen again for their justification. And the exhortation to all was to look unto Christ, to come unto Him, to receive Him, —all which varied expressions mean to believe in Him as able to save unto the uttermost all who come unto God by Him. Such is the divine simplicity of the gospel doctrine ; such are the glad tidings of great joy, that to as many as receive Him, Christ gives power to become the sons of God, even to those who believe in ‘ His name ; that to all who believe in Him, ‘ He is made of God wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.’

But now, as has been already hinted, very different views from these are held by many at the present day. Old errors have been revived, and industriously propagated, that Jehovah loves all men *equally* ; that Christ made atonement for the sins of all men *equally* ; and that if they would *but believe it*, sinners are *already* pardoned ! According to this view, then, *the object* of faith, that which it has to rest upon, *is the assertion* that the love of God extends equally to all, and that the act of

pardon is already past, and lies for the sinner's acceptance whenever he may be disposed to take hold of it. Yea, and more than this, it is asserted that no special exercise of the Holy Spirit's grace is necessary to move men to accept of what is thus offered to them; but that the various arguments and persuasives contained in the divine Word itself are, when seriously listened to, sufficient, without any spiritual illumination or aid, to draw them into a state of safety. Now it would be impossible to enter at length into an examination of all the errors which are contained within the compass of this brief statement; but concern for the interests of truth demands that we advert for a few moments to one or two of them. First, then, *it is not true* that the love of God extends to all men equally. His love is *sovereign*, and is bestowed sovereignly—that is, upon *whomsoever He will*! So it is written, 'He hath mercy upon whom He will have mercy, and He will have compassion upon whom He will have compassion.' It is also written, that, at the judgment day, He will say to those on His left hand, 'Depart from me, *I never knew* you, ye workers of iniquity.' The whole bearing of the Scripture, indeed, shows us that God's love is sovereign and special, resting upon those who are sometimes called His people, at other times the sheep of His pasture, His chosen, His Church. Nothing could better illustrate this than the history of the Israelites, who were separated from the rest of the world as a peculiar people, of whom the Lord says, that them only He had known of all the nations of the earth; and whom He calls precious in His sight, His portion, and the lot of His inheritance. And if, under the New Testament economy, the distinction between them and the Gentiles has been removed, if 'now there is neither Jew nor Greek, but all are one in Christ Jesus,' still, it is upon the whole body gathered together into one in Christ Jesus that His love rests. So the Scripture teaches us, when it says, 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ: according as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love: having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to

Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, wherein He hath made us accepted in the Beloved.' If any further proof were necessary that the divine love does not extend *equally* to all, but is sovereign in its outgoings, this one passage might suffice: 'He that believeth on the Son of God hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son of God shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.' *Here* all those who cannot claim Christ as their own, and that is confessedly by far the greater part of the human race, even by far the greater part of those who are called by the name of Christ, are represented as in the awful condition of being *at present*, as they have ever been, under the wrath of God, and therefore exposed to all the tremendous consequences of His displeasure! It is very true that all men indiscriminately, that is, without reference to spiritual state and character, are partakers of His providential bounties; so also are the lower animals; but with respect to the bestowing of all the blessings pertaining to spiritual and eternal life, although the doctrine has always been distasteful to the proud heart of man, the divine procedure is in accordance with the principle above stated, that 'the Lord hath mercy on whom He will have mercy.' Again, *it is not true* that Christ made atonement for the sins of all men without exception. It must be admitted, indeed, that there are a few isolated passages, which, to an unreflecting reader, may seem to convey that meaning; but there is not one of these which has not been explained in perfect consistency and harmony with the doctrine, that He made atonement only for the sins of His own people. That the blessings procured by the atonement of Christ are not confined within a certain space, or to any particular nation, as were the privileges of the Old Testament Church; that pardon and peace and sanctifying grace are procured for all men—that is, without *distinction* of class or nation—is acknowledged; but that they have been procured for all men *without exception*, is as contrary to Scripture as it is inconsistent with experience. Christ, the Good Shepherd, laid down His life for the sheep. He is said to have purchased the Church with His own blood. He does not intercede for all men, but only for those whom the Father

had given to Him. He did not come to give His life a ransom for *all men*, but for *many*. In the institution of the Lord's Supper, He does not say, This is my blood of the New Testament, shed for the remission of the sins of *all men*, but shed for the remission of the sins of *many*. Further, it is most obvious from the Scripture that there is an inseparable connection between Christ's procuring of redemption and the effectual application of it; so that the parties to whom it is effectually applied, and those only, are the parties for whom it has been procured. 'Whom He did predestinate, them He also called: and whom He called, them He also justified: and whom He justified, them He also glorified.' Here the whole process of redemption, if we may so speak, from its origin in the eternal counsels of God, by whom those who were to be redeemed were chosen in Christ Jesus, to its consummation in their being exalted to eternal glory, is set before us at one glance; and the parties who were included in the decree of electing love are also the parties who are finally glorified. Again we read, 'God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.' Those for whom Christ died are justified by His blood, and saved from wrath. But it is unnecessary to produce additional passages. We may just ask, if the love of God extends to all men without exception, and if Christ made atonement for the sins of all men without exception, so that pardon is procured for all, how comes it that the greater part of mankind perish in their sins? An atonement, —satisfaction to divine justice, rendered in behalf of the countless multitudes who have nevertheless to suffer, in their own person for ever, the inflictions of offended justice; pardon of sin procured for those who shall nevertheless lie for ever *unpardoned*, and writhing under the torture which is the penalty of a violated law;—this surely is incomprehensible! Yet it is the conclusion to which we must come, if we hold that Christ made atonement for the sins of all men. And it will not avail to say, that, if men *would believe*, the benefits of the atonement, pardon and all its fruits, would be theirs, and that they are condemned for their unbelief. For what are they to believe?

According to this doctrine, which we combat, they are to believe *not* that they lie exposed to the claims of justice, from which none but Christ can deliver them, but that all its claims have actually been satisfied in their behalf *already*; not that they need the forgiveness of their sins, which they can only obtain through Him who is exalted to bestow it, but that forgiveness has been already granted to them, and that they are already in possession of the favour and love of God! In other words, it is *their believing* which makes that to be a satisfaction of justice that otherwise would in reality be no satisfaction; it is their believing that establishes a forgiveness and a love, which otherwise would have no real and practical effect for the benefit of perishing men. Who does not perceive how fearfully erroneous the doctrine must be, which involves such consequences? The doctrine, on the other hand, which we hold, and which the Scripture teaches, is, that Christ made a real satisfaction for the sins of those whose Head and Representative He was; that He fulfilled all the righteousness of the law in their stead; that, by the agency of His Spirit, and through the instrumentality of the Word, they are all in due time led to feel their need of Him, and to place their confidence in Him, as able and willing to save sinners; and that thus believing in Him, He is *the end of the law for righteousness to them*; that they obtain, in virtue of His atonement and intercession, the pardon of all their sins, the communication of sanctifying grace, and, in the end, the everlasting inheritance. We do not come to men, because we have no warrant to come to them, saying to them individually, Christ died for *you*, and your sins are blotted out; believe this, and you will assuredly be saved. But we say, Christ died to save sinners; you are a sinner, you need His salvation; believe in Him with all your heart, receive Him as able and willing to save, place full and unreserved confidence in His Word, in His sacrifice, in His power, and for His sake you will be pardoned and accepted of God, and put in possession of all the privileges of His children. And if the sinner, enlightened and quickened by the Spirit, does embrace the Saviour and give himself to Him, then, in the exercise of faith, and strengthened by the same Spirit who planted it in his heart, he may at



length be able to say with the apostle, 'I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life that I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who *loved me*, and gave Himself for *me*.' And, my friends, we do not feel ourselves straitened in any measure in offering Christ to sinners generally, as the wisdom of God, and the power of God unto salvation, by the consideration that His own people only for whom He died will reap the benefits that flow from His death. What we are concerned to press on men's attention is the faithful saying, that 'Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners.' Wherever we find a sinner, this truth we can urge as broad enough to present a shelter to him from the wrath to come. And when we have urged the truth, and endeavoured to show him his need of the Saviour, and the Saviour's suitableness for him, we leave the issue in the Spirit's hand, assured that the truth as applied by Him will find out all who have been given to Christ, and will in due time gather them into the fold, as trophies of the power of sovereign grace, and of the unsearchable riches of redeeming love!

II. But now we must consider for a few moments, as was proposed, *how* it is brought about that Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.

Here much might be said, but we must be very brief. These two points, if well considered and understood, will sufficiently answer our present purpose: *First*, The particular position which Christ occupied when He rendered that obedience to the law which He did render, and endured the penalty which it had denounced against sin; and *secondly*, The particular relationship to Him which those enjoy who are led by the Spirit to believe in Christ. First, with respect to the particular position which Christ occupied. Now, as has of necessity been repeatedly stated already, it was in the capacity of a Covenant Head and Surety or Substitute that Christ was made under the law, and fulfilled all its righteousness, as well as submitted to its curse. This is manifest from many passages of Scripture. More especially it is largely insisted on in Romans v. There the apostle contrasts Christ

the second Adam with the first Adam, showing, that as by the first, sin and misery were entailed upon all mankind, whose head and representative he was ; so by the second Adam, life and every blessing are conveyed to those whom He represented. 'Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation ; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.' The contrast would not have point or significance if Christ were not here spoken of in the capacity of a head and representative, as Adam was. The same train of illustration is pursued by the apostle in the fifteenth chapter of first Corinthians. And it is with reference to the great truth of His being the Covenant Head of His people that they are said to be chosen *in* Him, and to be given to Him by the Father, and that He is introduced as saying, 'Behold I and the children which God hath given me.' And further, that He acted as their Substitute or Surety is also manifest. 'Surely He hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows.' 'He was wounded for our transgressions.' 'He Himself bare our sins in His own body on the tree.' 'He hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us.' And all this was most voluntary on His part, as is declared in His own words : 'Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God.' Then, secondly, consider the particular relationship to Him which those enjoy who are led by the Spirit to believe in Him. The believer in Christ is accounted one of His members. *He* is the Head of the body, the Church ; and each separate believer is a member in particular. Christ identifies Himself with the whole body, regarding what is done for their benefit as done for Himself, and any wrong inflicted on them as injury perpetrated against Himself. He calls them His seed, His children, His brethren. Now it is in consequence of this union between Him, the Head, and His people, the members, that He is the end of the law for righteousness to them. When He rendered to it that obedience which it demanded, they, regarded as one with Him, were counted to have rendered it. When He suffered, they were counted to have suffered with Him. When He died, they were counted to have died with Him. When He rose from the dead, their

resurrection was by that made good. And as He is in glory, they will be sharers of His glory; they shall sit with Him upon His throne. The law cannot condemn Christ, neither can it condemn believers; they are freed from its condemning power in Him; as it is expressed in the Scripture, 'They are dead to the law by the body of Christ.' The righteousness of the law was fulfilled in Him, and it is fulfilled in them. And thus, in a word, He who knew no sin was made sin for them, that they might be made the righteousness of God in Him. In virtue of their union to Him through faith, a union which never can be dissolved, *their* guilt was laid to His account, and His righteousness is put to theirs. And who then can rise up against them to condemn them? They can lay claim to a perfect righteousness as belonging to them, because it belongs to Him who is one with them. The law can ask for nothing more, for with that righteousness the Almighty Lawgiver is well pleased; and so Christ is indeed the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.

Now, my friends, this subject which we have been handling is a most momentous one. We have been constrained to treat it more doctrinally than may seem desirable to some; but there is necessity for our exhibiting from time to time the form of sound words which we have received. Let this practical truth now be pondered, as containing an improvement of the whole subject. The law must have its end wrought out, because it is perfect and unchangeable. And what must its end be in the case of those who believe not in Christ, and therefore have no interest in Him? My friends, it is very fearful to contemplate this. Every day it comes to the sinner, demanding full obedience, and every day it is set aside with further dishonour done to it. Will it ever cease to haunt the steps of the man who is out of Christ? It never will, although he may not perceive it. It will be with him at the time of his dissolution. It is the law that creates those terrible deathbed scenes which we sometimes read of. 'For the sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law.' But if even at that time the sinner should not feel its grasp, if its claims and its threatenings should not

then be noticed, it will pursue him still, and find him out at the judgment. It will fasten upon him amid all that vast assemblage; it will drag him to the tribunal; it will plead against him all his violations of its authority; and it will demand its right to have full end upon him, in the infliction of its vengeance. And there will be no counter-pleading. There will be no surety or substitute to urge that he did what the sinner did not and could not *personally* do; and so the law will have him as its rightful prey—never, never to relax its hold. Oh, then, is not theirs the true safety and the true blessedness, who, in the person of their Substitute, have fulfilled all the righteousness of the law, and against whom no charge can be brought, because Christ hath died, yea rather, is risen again?

And what urgency should there not be in our prayer, that the Lord would give us, by His Spirit, a believing heart, that thus being united to Christ, we may have Him as the Lord our righteousness! Amen.

## XVIII.

### THE COMMUNICABLE FULNESS OF CHRIST.

‘For it pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell.’—COL. I. 19.

**T**HE apostle’s discourse here is of Christ, and the language which he employs is designed to convey this idea: That let us imagine every kind of glory and excellence, every quality that is in itself infinitely to be admired, and every grace that is incomparably beautiful and attractive, and every attribute that is in its own nature the proper object of love and confidence, and that in its exercise imparts blessedness to others;—all these things, yea, and more than these,—all that is conceivable, and more still, all that is possible, of glory and excellence will be found in Christ, ‘for it hath pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell.’ The text, in a word, while it expresses all that language can express with respect to perfection, yet contains within itself the acknowledgment, that it is impossible to unfold the whole. And the same remark may be made regarding other passages where our Lord is spoken of; as when the apostle tells us of ‘the unsearchable riches of Christ,’ and when he says that ‘in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.’ We cannot help therefore being arrested at once, when we merely read the words of the text, by the singular fact, that while the Scripture should thus present Christ to the view of men, as so glorious, so engaging, and so desirable, He should nevertheless be regarded by the greatest part of them as having no beauty wherefore He should be desired. We look at the condition of the human race; and what does the survey of it disclose to us? Do we find the soul of man so richly stored, within itself, with all the means of gratification and enjoyment, that it needs not search for what is good without, but may

feed endlessly upon its own satisfying stores? Do we find all its powers and faculties so perfectly adjusted and so vigorous, that they can discriminate clearly between good and evil, truth and error; all its affections so nicely balanced, that they rest only on proper objects; and all its desires so accommodated to the things around them, that every craving can be satisfied? And then, as to the body, do we find it a suitable tenement for such a soul, its willing instrument in working out its purposes, and never impeding it in its noble exercises by pain or lassitude or disease? And further, as to the relation in which man stands to God, is he in the enjoyment of his Maker's favour? Is he kept in this world for a short season under training, that he may be fitted for a higher state, in which the divine beneficence shall pour in him incessantly the full tide of blessedness? Has he the righteousness which the law of God demands; the holiness on which the pure eye of the Eternal One looks with complacency; the dispositions and tastes which are necessary to qualify him for the enjoyment of the society of God? In a word, is his condition in this world, as *a creature capable of happiness*, so perfect and so independent, that he needs no peculiar interposition of the divine goodness in his behalf, to add to the real comfort of his earthly lot? And is his condition, as *an accountable creature*, so favourable, that he can look up to the Holy One with confidence, as needing no mercy to pardon, no grace to regenerate, and no righteousness to shield him from the condemnation of the law? We need not answer these questions. Doth not the whole creation groan and travail together in pain? Is not the mind subject to sufferings most intense, and the body to diseases most painful? Does not conscience proclaim man a sinner, guilty before God, and therefore under His displeasure? And does not the divine word declare him to be poor, and wretched, and miserable, and blind, and naked? It is to man, then, in this most pitiable estate—a rebel, an outcast, sentenced to die eternally, having nothing of his own to make him truly happy, unable by any effort of his own to avert his doom, in need of everything—that the Lord comes in the gospel; and pointing to Christ, His own Son, says, Here is the remedy for all your

evils, however great they be; here is the supply of all your wants, however varied and numerous; receive Him, and you receive all things along with Him, 'for in Him all fulness dwells.' This is God's own testimony. It is addressed to all men without exception; and might it not be supposed that it would be hailed by all as indeed glad tidings of great joy—that all would be seen falling down in submission, and with adoring gratitude, before this offered Saviour, each more anxious than another to appropriate the blessings which He brings? But alas! it is not so. In this world, which was made by Him, Christ presents Himself to the acceptance of men, and they receive Him not; the light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehendeth it not. We cannot dwell at present upon the causes by which infatuated mortals are influenced thus to reject the counsel of God against themselves. Our Lord sums them up emphatically in one brief sentence: 'This is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil.' But the fact is unquestionable, and it is most lamentable. Even among those now hearing me, and who are named by the name of Christ, there is too much reason to fear that there are some who have hitherto refused to receive Him and submit to Him, who have never felt their need of those blessings which He offers to their acceptance, and who are therefore still under wrath and condemnation. How miserable their state! Standing as it were at the very threshold of the divine storehouse, where there is everything they need, and famishing for want of the very bounties which are there to be obtained, they will not enter in and partake. Wounded and dying, they will not apply to the only Physician who can cure them. Lying under the withering curse of Jehovah, they will not strive to escape from it. Chained in the dark prison-house of Satan, and groaning sometimes under the weight of their chains, they will not listen to the voice of Him who offers to strike them off, to set open the prison door, and to bring them forth to the enjoyment of a glorious liberty. Shall we leave them then in this hopeless condition, to reap the fruits of their infatuation, and to perish in their sin? Nay, we would make

an effort to rouse them from their lethargy, and to draw them from bondage to freedom, from death to life, by setting before them at present the fulness that is in Christ. And as it may be that some even of those who have received the Saviour have their views clouded through temporary unbelief, or have lost that realizing sense of His love which they once experienced, or do not enjoy that closeness of communion with Him which at one time made their hearts so glad, the consideration of the fulness of Christ may, by the blessing of the divine Spirit, serve to bring them again into the sunshine; for assuredly they will perceive that neither are the fountains of His love dried up, nor are the riches of His grace diminished. In handling this subject, we shall speak, in the first place, of the fulness of Christ referred to in the text; and in the second place, of the way in which it may be appropriated so as to become ours.

I. In the first place, let us speak of the fulness of Christ referred to in the text. Now, there are two senses in which this expression may be understood. There is what is usually called Christ's *essential* fulness, and there is His *communicable* fulness. His essential fulness is that perfection which belongs to Him as God, and which is referred to in the Scripture in such terms as these: 'The glory which He had with the Father before the world was.' Then, if we were to speak of the fulness of Christ in this sense, we would have to recount all the perfections of the Godhead; for they are ascribed to Him, not in any figurative or shadowy sense, but *actually* and really, showing that He, who by His assumption of the human nature might truly be called the Son of man, was at the same time the eternal Son of God. The various names by which God has been pleased to reveal Himself to us in His Word, the various titles which are there given to Him to distinguish Him from all other beings, the various attributes which belong to Him exclusively, as the self-existent, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable One, who is the fountain of all being and the author of all blessedness, are all ascribed to Christ; so that, in whatever sense it may be said that the Father has all perfection and all glory in Himself, independently of His creatures,



in the same sense it may be said that in Christ all fulness essentially dwelleth. 'He is the image of the invisible God (ver. 15), the first-born of every creature: for by Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him, and for Him: and He is before all things, and by Him all things consist. And He is the Head of the body, the Church: who is the beginning, the first-born from the dead; that in all things He might have the pre-eminence. For it pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell.' The subject to which I would specially call your attention in this discourse, is not this *essential* fulness of Christ, but what may be called His *communicable fulness*. As Mediator, Christ had a certain work to perform, and a certain reward promised to Him for that service which He should render. This is frequently alluded to in the Scripture. 'He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied.' 'Therefore will I divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong; because He hath poured out His soul unto death: and He was numbered with the transgressors; and He bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.' 'Being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient to death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name.' 'Jesus, for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.' In all these places honour and power are represented as conferred upon Christ, because of the work which He executed in the days of His humiliation: the honour of being Head of the body, the Church; the power of bestowing the richest blessings upon His people. So speaks the apostle most clearly in another place, when he says of Him, 'Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered; and being made perfect, He became the author of *eternal salvation* unto all them that obey Him.' Then the *communicable fulness* of Christ, whereof I am now to speak, is all those various blessings which, as Mediator, He has acquired

the right and power to bestow on creatures, worthless in themselves, but precious in His sight, because they are the purchase of His blood ;—all those blessings which, under various names, are comprehended in the expressive term ‘ grace,’ and which, in their full measure and perfection, are summed up by the apostle in the two words above quoted, ‘ eternal salvation.’ And that we have the authority of Scripture for thus viewing the Redeemer’s fulness, as signifying the grace which He confers or communicates, is plain from what is stated in John’s Gospel : ‘ The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us ; and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth : and of His fulness have all we received, even grace for grace.’ Our discourse then, at present, being of that fulness of grace which it hath pleased the Father that Christ should have to bestow, the principal difficulty is to make a selection of the particulars which chiefly require to be specified. For the subject is exhaustless.

1. In the first place, there is in Christ *all fulness of life*. Hence He is called ‘ the Prince of life.’ In John’s first epistle, He is designated ‘ *eternal life*’: ‘ We show unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and which was manifested unto us.’ And that He bestows life is declared in passages innumerable. ‘ Because I live,’ He says, ‘ ye shall live also.’ ‘ The Father hath given Him power over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as have been given Him.’ ‘ This is the record, that God hath given unto us eternal life, and this life is in His Son.’ And with respect to this life of which we speak, we are fully informed in the Scripture by what agency it is imparted. The *right* to give it, you perceive, is Christ’s. It is one of His purchased prerogatives. But it is conveyed to those on whom it pleases Him to bestow it, by the *ministration* of the Holy Spirit : hence called in Scripture ‘ the quickening or life-giving Spirit.’ Because Christ has gone to the Father, He sends forth the Spirit, by whose operation the soul is quickened ; so that where the Holy Spirit is, and there only, there is life. And although it is impossible for us to comprehend the manner of the Spirit’s operation in giving life to the soul,—impossible even for those in whom the vital principle has been implanted,

to tell how it was put within them,—yet the *fact* that there is life, is made good by proof as palpable as that which shows the difference between the dead and living body. Thus *life* and *motion* are always associated together in our minds. Now, where the quickening Spirit is not, there is no movement of the soul toward God: as an object of affection, He is not in all the thoughts. But where the spiritual life is communicated, the soul is turned toward God as the chief good; in the expressive language of the psalmist, ‘It followeth hard after God.’

Again, *life* and *feeling* are inseparably connected together in our minds. Where the Holy Spirit is not, there is an utter insensibility manifested toward the invitations and promises of the divine Word. The glorious things which God hath laid up for them that love Him excite no desire and no hope. And if the terrors of the law sometimes produce a passing shudder, yet is it no more a symptom of life than is the sudden contraction of the muscle which galvanism produces in the inanimate frame. But where the spiritual life has been imparted, the soul is awed by the threatenings of God’s Word, is gladdened and stimulated by its invitations, and is elevated and invigorated by its precious promises. Thus it is not difficult to know where life reigns; or at least it is not difficult to know, from such symptoms as have been mentioned, where death has still the mastery. And now, my friends, let me press upon you the question, How fares it with your souls as to this important matter we have been handling? You perceive that there is life in Christ; that to have the power of dispensing it, He became obedient unto death; that His Spirit conveys this life to the soul, and that the reality of it in the soul is manifested by its following hard after God, and by its exhibiting holy feelings and desires. Have your souls been thus quickened? Have you thrown off the deadly lethargy into which sin had sunk you, and put forth that activity in doing the will of God which proves that you have been made alive from the dead? Between death and life there can be no middle state, as there can be no fellowship. Sleep, indeed, seems to be, as it were, life in death; and God’s people are sometimes found to *sleep* spiritually. But yet, as in sleep the

warm current of life continues its incessant flow, so even when he has been betrayed into spiritual slumber, the believer's love and all the other graces which indicate life are still at least perceptible : and so the difference, although not so marked, is yet as great as ever between life and death. Have you then received the life ? If not, there is no other alternative ; you are dead in trespasses and sins. And what shall we say here ? The dead cannot praise God, they cannot serve Him, they cannot enjoy Him ; and, what seems to us more awful still, they cannot love Him. Man, God's highly gifted creature, who has a heart that can be touched with sympathy for his fellow-man, that can glow with ardent affection, that can admire what is heroic and generous and excellent in human conduct, that feels itself constrained to bow with reverence before the dignity of virtue,—man with that heart, while he is dead in sin, cannot love God. What a terrible condition for an immortal creature whose destinies are in God's hand ! Who among us would not desire to be delivered from such a state ? Then here is the deliverer, and here is the deliverance. Christ is the Prince of life ; and he that hath Christ hath life. What would not the poor sinner who is tossed upon the deathbed, and terrified at the thought of meeting God, give for a few weeks' reprieve ! Then what shall we say is the proper value of that spiritual life, which is not only the earnest, but the very beginning of life eternal ? My friends, it is offered to you without price. Christ bought it with His own life, that He might give it free to you. And if ye refuse it, ye remain sealed up in death, to abide the judgment of the living God.

2. But, in the second place, there is in Christ all fulness of pardoning mercy. If man dead in sin needs the life which Christ imparts, man guilty and under wrath stands equally in need of pardon ; and Christ has acquired the right to bestow pardon. 'He has power on earth to forgive sins.' 'The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin.' 'I, even I, am He,' He says, 'that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins.' The pardon, like the life, is *free*. 'We are justified *freely* by the grace of God, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.' It is also

most *full*. 'Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Lord, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.' Christ is represented sitting as a priest upon His throne. It was in virtue of the sacrifice of Himself, which, as the High Priest over the house of God, He offered up, that He obtained the kingly dignity; and now, when a sinner, weary and heavy-laden with the burden of his iniquities, moves toward Him, the sceptre of reconciliation is stretched out to him, and that sinner obtains the remission of all his sins. But here, my friends, we cannot help remarking, that from the very fulness of pardoning mercy, and the freeness with which it is exercised, men are *in danger of forgetting* at what a cost Christ acquired that power which, as a Prince and a Saviour, He possesses to give remission of sin. And then, again, because they forget this, they trifle with the pardon which, in His gospel, He offers them, and think it will be time enough to seek for it when they are unfit for any other exercise. Oh, let it be remembered, then, that in order that the writ of pardon might be made out, and signed, and sealed, the Eternal Word had to become flesh,—had thus in man's nature to obey the law of God, which man had broken, and to blot out the sentence of the law against those He came to save, by submitting to the sentence in His own person. There were four thousand years of preparation for that work which Christ had to execute, before, consistently with Heaven's holiness and justice, sin could be forgiven. Pardoned sinner, before the law would let go its hold of thee, the Son of God had to fulfil every requirement of it; before the stain of guilt could be washed away from thee, the blood of the Son of God had to be shed; before thou couldst escape from the curse, Christ must endure it; before thou couldst obtain a covert from devouring wrath, *He* must drink the cup of indignation even to the dregs! And, *sinner unpardoned*, during thy whole lifetime, thou hast been making sport of Christ's sufferings, and trampling under foot His precious blood! Is it not time now to lay this to heart, and to seek the pardon without which thou art lost for ever? That pardon is still offered, it is offered to every sinner hearing me. It might be thought that

long neglect, reckless indifference, continued ingratitude, would have steeled Christ's heart against you, and provoked Him either to withdraw the offer from you or to thrust *you* away beyond the reach of it. But no. It is here this day as full and as free as ever. The picture which we have before our mind of Christ's attitude at this moment toward you, is that of Him stretching forth His hands, with compassion and tenderness beaming from His countenance, and imploring you to come to Him, and He will receive you and blot out all your iniquities, and deal with you as with children. And will you say nay? Shall that loving Saviour plead in vain? It cannot be. There *are* some who will cast themselves into His arms. And let not the sense of aggravated guilt keep any back. For surely the fulness of pardoning mercy, a fulness that is unfathomable, is revealed in these words: 'The blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, cleanseth from all sin.' But while we speak of the fulness of mercy, we are reminded that under one aspect the subject needs to be placed clearly before the view even of the children of God themselves. It sometimes happens, that in a season of darkness and disquietude, those who have given evidence of the genuineness of their faith are tempted to suppose that they have been deceiving themselves, and that there is no hope for them in God. The conviction of their guilt *generally*, or of the greatness of some particular sins into which they have been betrayed, presses upon them so heavily that they suppose they cannot be forgiven. Now, we would never speak as if any sin were in its nature trifling, or as if the conviction of sin could be too strongly felt. But we would have it remembered, at the same time, that dishonour is done to Christ, when it is supposed that any one who comes to Him with sincere and humble heart imploring pardon will be refused. 'He will abundantly pardon,' it is said. But the expression is more significant than it appears to be. The meaning is, 'He will multiply to pardon.' It just seems designed to meet such a case as that we have supposed. When a man gives himself up for lost, saying, I have so often professed repentance, and so often sinned again, that I have committed inexpiable outrage upon the divine mercy; we answer, it is well that you should be humbled, it

is not wonderful that you should be disquieted, and that you should suffer the horrors of remorse ; but still ‘ Christ multiplies to pardon,’ and your case is not hopeless. The fulness of His pardoning mercy cannot be exhausted. Go to Him with full confession, hide nothing of your guilt ; His blood cleanseth from all sin. ‘ He will speak peace to His people, but let them not return again to foolishness.’

3. But again, in the third place, I remark, that in Christ there is all fulness of peace and comfort. Comfort and pardon are naturally, yet not *necessarily*, connected together, as one may have peace with God, and acceptance with Him, which are never separated from pardon ; while, at the same time, he has not peace of conscience, the comfort which arises from the *sense* of his having been accepted. The act of pardon can never be repealed. He who has been once accepted can never afterwards be an outcast ; but peace of conscience may be withdrawn, and often is driven away by sin that wounds the conscience. Noah was safe in the ark, his refuge ; but he did not know that the flood, the messenger of wrath, had passed away, and that his deliverance was complete, until the dove came to him with the olive branch, the divine emblem of peace, in its mouth. And so the believer may be safe in Christ, his ark of refuge, and the storm of wrath may have completely rolled away from over his head ; but he knows it not fully until the Spirit, dove-like, bring to him the comfortable assurance, and write it on his conscience, that God has no longer a controversy with him, but is reconciled through the blood of the cross. Now it is from Christ that this peace and comfort flow. He is called ‘ the Prince of peace ;’ and He said to His apostles, ‘ Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you.’ His gospel is called the gospel of peace, not only because it offers sinners reconciliation with God, but also because in consequence of that reconciliation it brings them inward peace, which before they did not experience.

Now it might be supposed by any one who read those passages, in which peace is so fully promised, and in which the Lord commands His people to rejoice in Him, and to be of good cheer and of good comfort,—expressions which certainly imply that they must be in possession of peace of conscience ;—it

might be supposed, we say, that one peculiar characteristic of the followers of Christ would be their enjoying a holy calm and serenity of mind altogether different from anything that worldly men can enjoy, and immeasurably higher. And we would be disposed to affirm with all confidence, that *upon the whole*, except in those seasons when the conscience is deeply troubled, God's people *do* possess a measure of inward peace which worldly men cannot estimate; yea, that the fears of God's people do not so break up their quietude of mind, but that they have still inexpressibly greater comfort than can belong to those who are at enmity with God. But it must be confessed, upon the other hand, that when we contemplate the condition of the Church generally, we find but little that corresponds in experience to the magnificence of the promises. And why is this? Has the Lord spoken what He will not accomplish, and what the present circumstances of His people render it impossible for them to realize, when He has said, that 'He will keep them in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed upon Him, because they trust in Him'? This cannot for a moment be imagined. There must be some special reasons then for this state of things; and it is not difficult to discover them. It would be foreign to our present purpose to enter at length into the consideration of this subject; but two remarks may be offered in connection with it. And first, the peace which Christ bestows is not a grace which subsists apart from and independently of all other graces. It can only be maintained in proportion as the others are in healthy exercise. If the love of God waxes cold; if there is any declension in spirituality of affection; if the closeness of the believer's walk with God is interrupted; if faith is weakened, peace of conscience must be disturbed. This peace, indeed, is, if we may so speak, a grace exquisitely sensitive. A slight turning of the heart away from God will impair it; and so if it is found to be so different in the experience of God's people from what it is declared to be in the word of promise, it is in part to be ascribed to this, that *they* are satisfied with so scanty a measure of spiritual attainment generally. But secondly, the peace which Christ bestows is so little experienced *for this reason*, that men seek it where it is not to be found. We imagine



that it is to be drawn out from our own hearts, as the result of certain frames or states of feeling, instead of looking directly to Christ, from whom it flows. Can one see the glory of the firmament by shutting himself up in his own dark chamber? Nay; he must walk abroad, and look upward. Even so, when we sit constantly looking inward, we never can have the light of divine peace shining upon our souls. Let it not be thought that we decry the exercise of self-examination. There cannot be advancement made in holiness without it. But what we deprecate is, *that watching* of frames and experiences as if we were to make them the main grounds of our hope and confidence toward God. What can a man find in his own heart but much more that is fitted to humble him and make him afraid, than to make him satisfied? But if we would habitually look to Christ; if we would plant ourselves upon His finished work as the foundation of our hopes, and receive God's testimony that there is no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus; if we would cast the burden of our sin and guilt upon Him, as alone able to bear it; then would our peace be as a river flowing from an exhaustless fountainhead, and our joy and comfort no man would be able to take from us.

4. Now I might remark, in the fourth place, that in Christ there is all fulness of spiritual strength; but the time will not permit me to enlarge here. The Scripture tells us that in the Lord we have strength, as well as righteousness. And His servant could say, 'I can do all things through Christ strengthening me.' The Holy Spirit not only brings before the mind of the believer the promises and encouragements of the Word of God, which are in their nature fitted to invigorate the soul when it is contending against difficulties, just as the exhortations and counsels of those whom we venerate will arm us with perseverance, when, if left to ourselves and to our own resources, we would give up in despair; but He also imparts to us an actual energy of mind and purpose which enables us to surmount the obstacles that impede our progress. Now this energy is from Christ, because it is in virtue of His intercession that the Spirit is sent forth to strengthen us, in answer to our prayers. And hence the apostle, looking at what he had been privileged to accomplish, says, 'Yet not I,

but Christ in me.' We survey with astonishment the labours and exertions of the first followers of the Lord ; we read with wonder of the fortitude and constancy of the martyrs ; we cannot comprehend how weak humanity should have so gained the victory over all the trials from which flesh and blood are most ready to shrink. But the mystery is solved when we are informed that the very strength of Christ was in *these*, His faithful servants. And *that* strength is not diminished now. There was not a service they were enabled to perform, nor a sacrifice they had resolution to make, nor a trial they were animated to overcome, for which believers now might not be as fully equipped, and in which they might not be as successful, if they would only cast themselves as implicitly upon the promise of Him who hath said, 'My grace is sufficient for thee, for my strength is made perfect in weakness.'

5. I should remark further, in the fifth place, that in Christ is all fulness of *sanctifying* grace. 'Christ loved the Church, and gave Himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it. 'That He might sanctify His people with His own blood, He suffered without the gate.' 'He is made of God unto us sanctification.' These are delightful truths. They not only teach us that it is Christ's great purpose to have His people made holy, but that He Himself carries on the work. Here, as in every other department of the application of redemption, the Spirit is the agent. He takes of the things that are Christ's and shows them to the believing soul. He operates in two ways: *immediately*, by exciting holy affections and desires ; and *instrumentally*, through the Word, in making the love of Christ, as there revealed, be felt and realized ; so that the believer's heart is drawn toward Him, and his great aim is to glorify and to please Him. He also makes the authority of the word be felt, so that its commandments are taken as the rule for the regulation of the heart and of the life. And it is just in proportion to the closeness of the intercourse which the believer keeps up with his Lord, and the earnestness with which he pleads in His name for grace to resist evil, to mortify sin, to overcome the world, that the Spirit imparts to him divine energy, leads him onward in the knowledge of Christ, refreshes him with the sweet consciousness of Christ's

love, and satisfies him more and more with Christ's likeness. On this subject we might speak at great length ; but we must conclude.

II. The question now arises, How is all this fulness of Christ appropriated, so as to become ours ? The answer is, by faith. Faith is the hand or instrument by which we take from the storehouse of spiritual blessings the supplies we need. And because of the importance of this excellent grace, as the instrument of bringing these blessings to the soul, the same effects are attributed to it as to the agency of the Spirit. Thus our hearts are said to be purified by faith ; we are said 'to be sanctified by the faith that is in Christ.' 'We have access by faith into this grace, wherein we stand.' Faith, on the strength of the divine promises, carries the believer to Christ for everything, and obtains everything from Him. Faith unites the believer to the Saviour, and so Christ becomes wholly his, and he becomes wholly Christ's, living *on* Him, and living *for* Him. The believer, through faith, gives himself up to Christ ; and, through faith, Christ is made of God unto him wisdom and righteousness and sanctification and redemption. But we cannot speak further at present of these things ; we must now conclude.

Such then, my friends, is a brief sketch of some of the particulars which are included in the expression, 'the fulness of Christ.' The whole meaning of that expression language cannot unfold, the mind cannot imagine, even eternity will not reveal. But we can see enough, and know enough, to understand that the children of God, to whom this fulness is made over, are alone and truly blessed. Having Christ Himself, they have all things along with Him. All things are theirs. And now, poor sinner, who art out of Christ, what are thy possessions in comparison with this, and thy enjoyments placed side by side with these which Christ bestows ? Can anything be offered thee which will compensate for thy want of Christ ? The world says it can give thee happiness ; but how long does it last ? Satan says that he will make thee free from bondage, and fill thy cup with pleasure. But is

his service freedom? and is there no bitterness in the end in the cup which he puts into thy hand? This day, in the name and by the authority of the God of truth, we offer thee Christ, with all His fulness of life, of pardoning mercy, of peace, of strength, of holiness. Is not that offer worth acceptance? Will you venture again to put it away? Oh, no; open your hearts to the Saviour, and you will find by experience, that besides the fulness of which we have spoken, there is fulness, endless fulness of enjoyment in Him too. And this enjoyment is pure; it is satisfying; it is ever growing, with the advancing capacity of the soul to drink it in. It is enjoyment which then especially attains its fulness, when all earthly good must be left behind for ever. The grave, which is the dark bed of the ungodly, is the gate of glory through which the saints pass into the presence of their Lord: and in His presence there is fulness of joy; at His right hand there are pleasures for evermore. Amen.

## XIX.

### ON THE SUBJECT OF CONVERSION.

‘Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil.’—‘O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved. How long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee?’—JER. XIII. 23, compared with JER. IV. 14.

THE statements contained in these two passages seem at first sight to be inconsistent with one another. In the one it is declared, that it is utterly impossible for men left to themselves to produce a certain great change, which yet must be produced upon them, if they are to be eternally happy; just as impossible as it is for the leopard to change his spots, and the Ethiopian the colour of his skin. And in the other, again, there is a commandment issued to the effect, as it would appear, that they must themselves work out this change: ‘O Jerusalem, wash thine heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved.’ That there is no *real* inconsistency between the statements may easily be shown; because what is commanded in the one place, and declared to be unattainable by mere human effort in the other, is represented elsewhere in the form of a new covenant promise; as when the Lord says by Ezekiel: ‘Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the hard and stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.’ Here, what man is commanded to do, and which yet he cannot of himself do, but which must be done, in order to his attaining life eternal, the Lord is said to effect by the operation of His sovereign grace. The very fact, however, that there should be such commandments written in the Scripture as these: ‘Wash thine heart from wickedness;’

‘ Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and let him return unto the Lord ;’ ‘ Repent, and be converted ;’—this very fact shows that there is a certain instrumentality provided and to be employed, in connection with which the work of conversion is wrought ; and that it is in the faithful employment of this instrumentality that we may expect that sinners will be converted. Or, in other words, when we put together the three things, each of which has its own place in the Scripture—the commandment to turn to the Lord, the declared inability of man to turn, and the promise that the Lord will give the new heart and the right spirit, they plainly draw us to this conclusion, that men must not remain inactive with respect to their spiritual and eternal concerns, as if they had nothing to do until divine grace enlighten, subdue, and change them ; but that their activity must be put forth in a certain way, and directed toward a certain end, even the seeking after salvation ; and that, on its being thus put forth and directed, divine grace, *which alone can* convert the soul, will not be withheld. Let it be particularly observed, however, we do not affirm that there is any such connection between the exertion of man’s activity, in the use of means and the operation of grace, as that it is *only* when he is *in the diligent* use of them that converting grace will be given. For often the sinner is arrested when he is rushing headlong to destruction, and when there is no desire after God and after salvation in his heart. Thus the sovereignty of grace is demonstrated, and all boasting on the part of the creature is put to silence. Neither do we affirm that it is possible to fix the precise point where an unconverted man, anxiously concerned about the eternal well-being of his soul, and earnestly seeking to have it secured, will be met by the special grace of God ; but this we can affirm that the general rule in the divine economy is, that ‘ he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it is opened.’ These principles which have now been stated are very forcibly set forth in the doctrinal articles of our Church. If you ask how we are made partakers of the redemption purchased by Christ, the answer, which utterly sweeps away the notion that human power or agency can put us in possession of the blessings embodied in

the word redemption, is, that we are made partakers of the redemption purchased by Christ, by the effectual application of it to us by His Holy Spirit. If you ask how men are effectually called, or converted, which is the same thing, the answer is, by the power of God's Spirit, who convinces of sin, gives light to the soul, and subdues the stubborn will, thus leading the sinner to receive Christ, whom to receive is to obtain life. If you ask on what ground sin is pardoned, the answer is, through the free grace of God, on the ground of Christ's righteousness imputed to the believer, because by faith he becomes one with Christ. If you ask how outcast sinners come to have a place in the family of God, the answer is to the same effect: it is of the grace of God, who, being well pleased with Christ, His beloved Son, is well pleased with all who believe in Him, and counts them His children, because, believing, they are one with Him. If you ask how this faith is produced, which works such a change upon the condition and the prospects of those who have it, the answer is, that the Holy Spirit works faith in the heart, and so unites to Christ those in whom it is wrought. And if you ask further, how are sinful and corrupt men sanctified and made meet for the heavenly inheritance, still it is answered, by the free grace of God, whereby the old man is destroyed, and the new man is created, and those who naturally bear the image of the first Adam come to bear the image of the second Adam, who is the Lord from heaven. Thus there runs through the whole system of doctrine, as it is propounded in our standards, the recognition of divine grace, as alone effectual in turning the sinner to God, in enabling him to know and to serve God, and in fitting him for the enjoyment of God. But then there is another series of questions, which place these important subjects under a different aspect, just as the commandment of Scripture, 'Make you a new heart, and a new spirit,' which the Lord gives forth by Ezekiel, is different from the promise given forth by the same prophet: 'A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you.' 'What doth God require of us,' it is asked, 'that we may escape His wrath and curse due to us for sin?' Here, when brought within the range of God's requirements, we are brought within

the range of what *man must do* to be saved ; and the answer to the question is, that he must believe in Jesus Christ, and repent, and make a diligent use of all the outward and ordinary means of grace, by which God communicateth the blessings of redemption. And so, just as we have before represented the case, while salvation is of grace, man must not remain with his hands folded waiting for grace ; he must work, he must use means, he must throw his whole heart and soul into those exercises in which the Scripture tells him to seek after eternal life. Thus only may he expect to find it.

Now, having made these general observations, I would endeavour, by the blessing of God, to draw your attention in this discourse somewhat more particularly to the great scriptural doctrine contained in the passages that have been chosen as the text : *First*, That conversion is wholly the work of God, man himself being incapable of effecting it, by any means, or through any instrumentality ; and, *secondly*, and more particularly, That at the same time there are certain things which man may do, and can do, and must do, in order to his being converted. The practical result which is aimed at in the discourse is this: that there may be fastened upon every one the conviction of his responsibility to God, and the feeling that, if he make shipwreck of his soul, he is himself the destroyer of it.

First, then, we have to consider the question, that conversion is wholly the work of God, man himself being incapable of effecting it, by any means, or through any instrumentality. The leopard cannot change his spots, neither can the Ethiopian change his skin ; and as completely is it beyond the reach of man himself to turn from sin to God. Yet it is alleged by many, and the allegation is peculiarly calculated to please the carnal and self-righteous mind, that there is no immediate operation of divine grace needed to convert the sinner. Men are moved, it is said, by arguments addressed to their reason, and by appeals to their feelings ; they are wrought upon by fear and hope, and effectually influenced by these in the matters that relate to their everlasting safety, just as they are in matters pertaining to the present life and its interests. The Bible, it is affirmed, contains all the provision that is required,



and all that is to be looked for, in order to draw men over from death to life. And when we read that it is God who imparts spiritual life, that there is a second birth, that there is a change of heart, all these expressions imply nothing more than that, through the instrumentality of the divine Word, men are made alive, and born again, and changed; and the effect is said to be attributed to God, because the Word, by whose appeals and arguments it is produced, is the Word of God. In a word, according to this doctrine, there is no *immediate divine* agency required toward conversion. If sinners will but hear and receive the truth, they will be converted and saved. Now, there is an apparent simplicity in this kind of statement, which is calculated to gain for it the approbation of many. And as it makes a man's salvation to rest wholly with himself, putting life and death within his reach so thoroughly, that if he lives, he himself is really the author of the life, because the whole power rests with him of determining whether he shall live or die spiritually and eternally, it is not wonderful that it should be favourably entertained by very many. It is a sad and humiliating doctrine which we have to enforce in opposition to it, that man in the work of conversion is wholly impotent; and that when any who have been converted look back upon the change which has been wrought upon them, they must say, not by our own power, not by the exercise of our own reason, not by the mere determination of our own will, have we been delivered from death and raised to life, but by the operation of saving and sovereign grace. But such is the doctrine of the Scripture, and we shall now endeavour to establish it. And it is to the Scripture itself that we must appeal. Then what is the judgment of Scripture with respect to the condition of man as a fallen creature? Let us take some examples. First, 'he cannot please God.' This is declared plainly (Rom. viii. 8): 'They that are in the flesh cannot please God.' And who are those who are described as being in the flesh? The whole family of Adam, excepting such as have been born again; for Christ said to Nicodemus, 'That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit: marvel not that I said unto you, ye must be born again.' The *children* of man fallen

and corrupt, are fallen and corrupt also: this is the meaning of the words, 'That which is born of the flesh is flesh.' And when it is said that they that are in the flesh cannot please God, the conclusion is obvious, that no descendant of Adam can please Him, unless he experience that change which is called 'a being born of the Spirit.' And that to be born of the Spirit is something more than our being wrought upon by the truth of Scripture, to think and feel and act differently from what we did before, appears from the apostle's words: 'Ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, *if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you.*' The divine Spirit is recognised as present, and as putting forth His power, when men are born again; and until He thus puts forth His power, they are *in the flesh*, and cannot please God, however much their actions may seem to resemble those which His Word enjoins.

Again, man in his natural estate cannot love and serve God. He is described as being without God, and as being alienated from Him. The carnal mind is enmity against God. The point is very strongly brought out in 1 John iv. 20: 'If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?' Compare with this ver. 7: 'Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God.' There cannot then be love in our hearts toward the brethren, unless we have been born of God, *i.e.* unless the Spirit of God dwelleth in us; and if we do not love the brethren, we cannot love God. And certainly, therefore, so long as we are destitute of the Spirit, being incapable of loving, we are incapable of serving God, for which it is one of the very ends of conversion to fit us. Again, man of himself cannot do good either in the way of thinking or acting. 'We are not sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves.' 'A corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit.' The corrupt tree is just, under another similitude, that which is born of the flesh; and as the corrupt tree cannot bring forth but evil fruit, so nothing spiritually good can be thought or done by unregenerate man. Again, man of himself cannot believe God's word. 'How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour that cometh

from God only?' 'The god of this world hath blinded the minds of them that believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.' And in accordance with this it is stated, that when Lydia was arrested by the preaching of Paul, it was the Lord that opened her heart to attend unto those things that were spoken. Again, man of himself cannot come to Christ to be saved by Him. 'No man can come to me,' said the Saviour, 'except the Father, who hath sent me, draw him;' and afterwards, 'No man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father.' And to the same purpose He says elsewhere: 'I thank Thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. No man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal Him.'

But once more, man in his natural estate is represented in the Scripture as *dead in sin*. 'You, being *dead* in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath He quickened.' And in another place, 'You hath He quickened who were *dead* in trespasses and sins.' Then as the ear of the dead is sealed up against every sound, so are men while unrenewed insensible to the calls of God addressed to them in His Word. As the eye of the dead is closed against the light that shines around, so the spiritually dead perceive no excellency in Christ, and no beauty wherefore they should desire Him. As the dead hand cannot grasp, so the spiritually dead cannot lay hold of God's gracious offers. Such, then, are a few particular statements drawn from the Scripture respecting the natural condition of man; and certainly we think, that if common language has any meaning, they justify the inference that conversion must be wholly the work of God; man himself, according to the scriptural description of him that has been given, being incapable of effecting it, by any means, or through any instrumentality. He is dead, and it must be a power altogether beyond himself that quickens him. He cannot believe in Christ, or come to Him, until the Father draw him. He cannot repent until the spirit of repentance is poured out upon him. He cannot love God until that love

is shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Spirit given to him. He cannot turn to God until God Himself turn him; and hence the prayer of Ephraim is, 'Turn Thou me, and I shall be turned.' Now, as has been already remarked, this is a humbling doctrine. It makes man wholly dependent upon the grace of God; showing that it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that showeth mercy. And at first sight it must be confessed that there appears to be some foundation for the inference which has not unfrequently been drawn from it, that if the case be so, there is nothing left for man but to remain inactive and unconcerned, until that influence of the Spirit is exerted on him, which imparts life to the dead. And in the same way, it is sometimes asked, if men are spiritually dead, and thus unable to make any movement toward God, why preach to them, and call to them to repent and believe the gospel? But in answer to this, we reply, that in preaching and commanding sinners, who are dead in sin, to repent and turn to God, we are justified by the highest authority; for the apostle says, 'Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.' And when the Lord Himself came to the grave of Lazarus, He did not first exert His almighty power to infuse life into the cold and inanimate frame, and then command the man made alive to come forth; but while Lazarus lay in the grave dead, Christ cried with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come forth;' and the quickening energy went with the word, and broke the slumber of the grave. And so, when we tell men that they are without strength, that they are helpless, that by the Fall they have lost all inclination to spiritual good, that they are the servants of sin, the slaves of the wicked one, yea, dead in trespasses and sins; and at the same time command them, on God's authority, to shake off their fetters, and to arise from the dead; we trust to the divine power of the Spirit to carry life to their souls with our message; not imagining that the word itself can quicken, but believing that it is the Spirit's great instrument in quickening. And in like manner, while we say that nothing which men can do, can qualify them for conversion, or merit conversion, or be the cause of conversion, we say at the same

time, that there are certain things which they may do, and which they are bound to do, towards their conversion.

II. Let us then, as was proposed, in the second place, advert to some of these.

First, I notice then, here, in the first place, that as the Word of God is the common instrument of conversion, men may do something toward their conversion, and are bound to do so, in the way they read it, and the improvement they make of what they read. We admit most readily that there are many who from their youth have been taught to regard the Scripture with reverence, and who during their lifetime have been accustomed to read a portion of it every day, who yet are destitute of converting grace. We know that there are many who, when they hear conversion described, and the Word of God spoken of as the instrument by which it is ordinarily effected, will acknowledge, that though they have studied the Word, and are acquainted with its doctrines, they yet cannot venture to say that they have experienced this mighty change. And we know that there are very many against whom it will rise up in the judgment as a fearful aggravation of their guilt, that they have had the Scripture in their hands, and have read it, and have acquired a general knowledge of its contents, and yet have not embraced the Saviour whom it offers. So that, altogether, there may be a reading of the Scripture which tends not to conversion. But look, my friends, I beseech you, a little more closely at the subject, and you will perceive how much more there is within the compass of man's natural ability, in connection with the study of the Word of God, than he chooses to perform; and you will understand more clearly what we mean, when we affirm that by the study of it he can do something towards his conversion. When one is reading a treatise upon any subject that interests him, how does he act? Does he not account every other study for the time comparatively unimportant? Is he not glad when the leisure hour comes round, that he may again betake himself to his favourite book? Is not his whole mind concentrated upon what he reads? And when he ceases to read, does he not carefully ponder the

truths which he has so eagerly laid hold of? Well, then, is it not wholly within the power of any man to apply himself with as much devotedness to the study of the Word of God? That there is no other book on earth so valuable as the Scripture, can be proved by arguments which reason must acknowledge to be most weighty and conclusive. There is no other book of such surpassing importance and interest. It is a message from God; it reveals to man, a creature under the wrath of the Eternal, the way of escape from wrath; it makes known the everlasting destiny of man; it contains discoveries calculated to stir human feeling to its lowest depths, to awaken the most ardent desires, to excite the highest hopes, and to work upon the strongest fears of which the human heart is susceptible; it deals with the concerns and interests of an eternal state, in which every man who reads it will have his destiny irrevocably fixed. Then we say again, may not every one who takes the Bible into his hand, whether he be converted or unconverted, have such thoughts as these in his mind, and read accordingly? Can he not, while he reads, remember that it is God's own Word he has before him? Can he not concentrate his mind upon that book of matchless value, and keep before him the truth that it is addressed immediately to himself, a sinner? Can he not make its discoveries the principal subject of his study and meditation? Can he not pause and dwell with deepest awe upon those terrible threatenings which are written in it as with characters of fire? And can he not fasten his mind upon those displays of the love of God which are fraught with all the comfort that a sinner needs? It cannot be denied that all this is completely within the power of any man; and as little can it be denied, that although such reading of the Scriptures will not of itself produce conversion, yet it is closely connected with it. Take the example of the Bereans. It may, however, be said, How can it be supposed that an unconverted man will thus apply to the study of the Word of God, seeing it is one of the very characteristics of his condition, that he has no relish for divine truth, and no right feeling of its importance? And the remark appears to carry some force in it. But still we say, it is true that every man, be his

spiritual condition what it may, can read the Scripture frequently, can honestly endeavour to search out the meaning of it, can remember that God speaks to him in it, can regard it as a message addressed immediately to himself, and involving his eternal interests. And is not every man bound so to read it? Is he not without excuse if he does not so read it? And if there are any here who have hitherto treated that blessed Word with contempt, or who have looked into it with indifference, or have read it without a feeling of its importance, as God's message to them; then, if they perish, their blood is on their own head, for they have despised that Word which is the Spirit's instrument for enlightening the eyes, for making wise the simple, and for converting the soul.

In the second place, men can do something toward their conversion in the improvement they make of the ordinary means of grace, especially the preaching of the gospel. It is a common remark, that when the Lord has a purpose of mercy toward any people, He sends them a faithful ministry. And not unfrequently we can observe, how when cold, formal, and lifeless ministrations have been succeeded by an earnest and zealous and faithful preaching of the Word, there is an awakening among the people, a manifest shaking among the dry bones, a serious concern stirred up in men's minds about their salvation, and refreshing symptoms of spiritual life and growth. Then in such circumstances, should any one, offended by the faithfulness and earnestness with which the truth is pressed upon the conscience, and disturbed by the close appeals which are made to him respecting righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, withdraw himself beyond the reach of such appeals, and place himself under teaching which will not disturb his conscience or awaken his fears, might it not truly be said of him, that he rendered his conversion more unlikely than otherwise it would have been? Or more generally, should any one be found negligent of the means of grace, partial and irregular in his attendance on them, and inattentive even when apparently listening to the preaching of the Word, might it not truly be affirmed of such an one, that he was chargeable with raising obstacles in the way of his conversion? These things will not be called in question. Then

is it not within a man's own power, speaking generally (for there are some manifest exceptions),—is it not within a man's own power, we say, to be regularly in his place in the sanctuary? is it not in his power to choose faithful preaching? is it not in his power to bend his mind attentively to the truth proclaimed, to meditate on what he hears, to compare what is stated with the Word of God, to make application to himself of the subjects which are urged on his attention, to try himself by the marks that are given what his spiritual condition really is, and altogether to take some interest in Sabbath-day exercises, corresponding to the bearing which they have upon his eternal well-being? It will not be denied that all this is wholly within the power of any man; and that although such attendance upon the preaching of the gospel, and the other means of grace, does not necessarily produce conversion, yet it is intimately connected with it. Here, however, as in the former case, it may be said, that as the faithful declaration of the truth is distasteful and offensive to the carnal mind, it cannot be expected that unconverted men will receive it, and deal with it in the manner we have just described. And we admit that is not naturally suited to their taste. But they have the power of keeping their tastes and likings under subjection, when their temporal interests will thereby be promoted; and have they not the same power when their eternal interests are at stake? We say, every man in ordinary circumstances can come to the house of God regularly; while *there*, he can remember that he is engaged in solemn work; he can apply his mind to the sacred exercises; he can desire to be edified; he can make the truth matter of reflection; he can keep himself free from worldly employments that would drive it out of his thoughts. And is not every hearer of the Word bound for his own sake, and for the sake of his soul's salvation, thus to act? Is he not left without excuse if he fail so to act? My friends, if there are any present who have hitherto come up to the sanctuary merely from habit, and with no desire to be benefited, they have been doing what they can to put away conversion from them; and if they die in their sin, they are self-destroyers, for they have wilfully neglected one special part of the instrumentality



which the Spirit blesses for turning sinners from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to the living God. 'The preaching of the gospel is to them that perish foolishness; but it is the wisdom of God, and the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth.'

In the third place, men can do something toward their conversion through the instrumentality of prayer. It is a solemn truth that the prayer of an unconverted man cannot be acceptable to God. It wants all the elements of acceptability. It is neither the fruit of faith, nor is it perfumed by love; and without faith and love there can be no acceptable service. An unconverted man is essentially a wicked man, in the scriptural sense of the term; and we are informed that 'the sacrifice of the wicked is abomination;' and that 'if we regard iniquity in our heart, the Lord will not hear us.' Yet all men are commanded to pray; and that there might be no room for any one to claim exemption on the ground of unworthiness, the Apostle Peter commanded the Samaritan sorcerer, whom he described as in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity, to pray God, if perhaps the thought of his heart might be forgiven him. The duty then is binding upon all. Now there are certain things in connection with prayer which every man is competent to know and to observe. Thus, for example, every man can know that when he is addressing God immediately, as he does when he prays, it becomes him to cherish feelings of deepest reverence, and to weigh well the words he uses. Every man can know that as a sinner he deserves God's wrath, and that he needs to implore forgiveness. Every man must be sensible in what respects, and by what temptations, he is most easily drawn into the commission of marked iniquity, and can implore divine strength to guard him against such temptations. Every man can know that he needs vast changes to be wrought upon his feelings and his affections, as well as upon his conduct, that he may be what the Word of God commands all men to be, and can pray that these changes may be produced in him. Every man can know whether he *really* desires the blessings which he is accustomed to ask for, and thus can be sincere when he prays. Every man can feel the importance of the

blessings for which he pleads, and can therefore be *earnest* and *importunate* in his prayers. Every man, too, might pray more frequently than he does, which would be at once a proof of his earnestness and his sincerity. All these are completely within the compass of the power of every man, whatever be his spiritual state ; and although all of them together will not produce conversion, yet it will be admitted that they lie directly in the pathway to it. It may indeed be alleged that they can be absolutely of no avail, inasmuch as, according to the principle above laid down, the prayer of the unconverted cannot be acceptable. And so far this is true, that conversion cannot be purchased and cannot be merited by man. But may it not be that if you went to the footstool of God, affected with a sense of your wants, feeling and desiring, earnest and sincere, as every one ought to be when he is there, and as every one could be, then in that very exercise the Lord's special grace might teach you, and then, just as the teacher, when teaching the child to write at first, leads his hand throughout, making each letter the teacher's and the child's at once, so the Spirit then directing you, the prayer would be at once your prayer and the Spirit's prayer, and would find acceptance and an answer ? And at all events, if any of you perish, living in a prayerless state, or in the exercise of cold and formal prayer, your ruin will be chargeable against yourselves, if you have not *sought* in earnest and in sincerity the blessings of redemption offered in the gospel, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

There are many other things besides these that have been specified, which men of themselves are competent to do toward their conversion. They can avoid occasions to sin by which they have been led away ; they can serve God more faithfully, up to the light they have received ; they can read books describing the experience and the struggles and the triumphs of God's people ; they can choose the company of the godly. All these, and many other things that might be mentioned, are helps onward in the right path to Christ's believing people ; and as they are within the reach of all who honestly desire to be saved from the wrath to come, they may be important helps also to those who as yet are not of the Spirit, but of the

flesh. It is not to be forgotten, indeed, that after all the attainments which men can make by the exercise of their own faculties, and by their own activity, and with all their advancement, however closely it may bring them to resemble those who have been born not of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God, they are still but as the finely finished statue, contrasted with the living man it represents. It is the Spirit that quickeneth; and until the Spirit work, death reigns. It is quite possible to be not far from the kingdom of God, while not in it; and yet not to be *in* the kingdom, is to be *without*, where those that perish are. But still we think that we can leave this with you as a principle which cannot be questioned,—and it may well arouse to serious reflection all the thoughtless among us,—that not one now hearing me can lay the blame of his being eternally lost on any one but himself. There is not one who can say, ‘I have honestly done all I could; and that I am not converted and saved, is not to be attributed to me, but to the withholding of that special and saving grace, over which I have no control.’ My friends, we think your own consciences must already have convicted you of not having done all that you might have done, under any of the heads that have above been specified. You cannot, you dare not, say that you have read the Word of God with that deep earnestness and self-application and frequency with which it is becoming to read it. How know you but that you carelessly looked into that very chapter which contained the statement of the truth that was most suitable to your state of mind and feeling, and to your necessities at the time? You cannot, you dare not, say that you have waited on the preaching of the Word with that attention and that desire to profit which the exercise demands. You cannot, you dare not, say that your prayers have been such as should have been presented, and as you might have presented, to the searcher of the heart. Then, my friends, in these things you read your doom, the doom of the self-condemned. And now, finally, deceive not yourselves by false reasonings; as if, because conversion is the Spirit’s work, you had nothing to do respecting it yourselves. If it seem an impossible commandment, Wash thine heart from wickedness, since it is also said that you can

no more cleanse yourselves than the Ethiopian can change his skin, remember that God has promised to give a clean heart ; and let this drive you to the footstool with the earnest cry, ‘ Lord, I cannot cleanse myself : sprinkle Thou me, and I shall be clean ; wash me, and I shall be whiter than the snow.’  
Amen.

## XX.

### THE UNSEARCHABLE RICHES OF CHRIST.

‘Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.’—EPH. III. 8.

**H**UMILITY is an invariable accompaniment of true greatness ; and in the spiritual life it is one of the most marked characteristics of those who have made the farthest advancement in holiness. No man was more deeply imbued with it than the great apostle of the Gentiles. Eminent as he was for his peculiar gifts, and for the graces of the Spirit wrought in him, he yet speaks of himself as ‘less than the least of all saints.’ He could never wholly banish from his mind the painful recollection of his early career as a persecutor of the Church ; and his ever-growing knowledge of the spirituality of the divine law made him feel the more sensitively the plagues of his own heart ; so that he always speaks of himself as if he could not lie low enough at the feet of Jesus. Yet while he abased *himself*, he magnified his *office* ; not so much, however, on account of any external dignity which he supposed to belong to it, or desired to have appended to it, as on account of the position it enabled him to occupy, in proclaiming the offer of salvation to perishing men. Thus he glories, when writing to the Romans, that he had received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations, *i.e.* that he had received grace to be an apostle, to call men of every nation to the knowledge and obedience of the truth as it is in Christ Jesus. And to the same effect, he says in the text, ‘Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.’ He counted it as grace, *i.e.* high and special favour conferred upon himself, that

a service so great and so honourable should be entrusted to him, as that of being sent forth to the Gentiles, 'to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they might receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them who are sanctified by the faith of Christ.' Surely divine love was kindled up and burnt with rare intensity in the heart of that man, who, to make poor sinners blessed, submitted to a life of suffering and privation almost unexampled; who, to dispense the bread of life in a famishing world, was contented to endure the loss of all worldly good things; and who, to bring honour to Christ's name by diffusing abroad the fragrance of it, submitted to be treated as an evil-doer himself, and to be branded with every name of reproach and infamy. But inviting though the subject is, we cannot dwell upon the apostle's personal history. He himself leads us away from it to the contemplation of a higher theme, when he gives us this as the summary of the work which he was commissioned to perform, and which it was his very joy and life to accomplish, that he might 'preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ.'

The subject of his preaching we would on the present occasion make our own, although the very mode of expression which he employs shows sufficiently that we have to dig in an exhaustless mine, and that our efforts can only bring up to view a few of the precious things that lie nearest the surface, while there are treasures beneath which eternity itself will not disclose. This is our text, 'The unsearchable riches of Christ.'

And before we proceed farther, let us look for a moment, first of all, to the language which the apostle here uses. When he speaks of the *riches* of Christ, then, he employs terms which might be expected to gain for him a favourable hearing, and terms which in the same, or in similar applications, are very common in his epistles. 'The *riches* of the grace of God;' 'The *riches* of the glory of God;' 'The *riches* of the glory of the inheritance of God in the saints,'—these, and other expressions of the same kind, must be familiar to all who have read attentively what Paul has written.

Now he did not write with craft and guile to deceive. It

is very plain, therefore, that when he alludes so often to riches, he felt that he had something to offer men which was worthy of the name, although different from that which the *mere name* would suggest to their minds. In his days, as in our own, the acquisition of money formed the chief pursuit of the greater part of mankind; and happiness was foolishly measured by the degree of success with which that pursuit was crowned. Then you have here the apostle standing forth, as it were, amid the busy haunts of men, all of them intent, in their different avocations, upon becoming rich. And *he*, interrupting their pursuit, and beckoning to them to turn aside for a little, and listen to him, tells them that he will give them what will make them immensely rich. And he does accordingly make offer of great things to them. He speaks to them of a dignity to which they may be raised, even that of being made children of God. He promises them peace and joy and blessedness, if they will become the followers of Jesus Christ. He points to a kingdom and an inheritance incorruptible, to which they will certainly be brought, if they will give themselves to Christ, and be contented to suffer tribulation for a season as His disciples. But alas! he only offers them spiritual riches. And is that all? say the lovers of pleasure, and the worldly-minded, and the covetous. This is vain, or dreaming; let us pursue our present courses; let us realize the substantial good. And so they turn away; although in sober earnest the apostle offers what no worldly wealth can purchase, and what, in the end, men would willingly give all they are worth to have. Present peace and happiness, and eternal glory,—all these are to be found in Christ, and in Christ alone. And were there nothing else to be enjoyed, in virtue of the believer's union to Him, the expression, 'the riches of Christ,' might be taken *literally*, and safely put forth as containing good infinitely beyond what the world at its best can bestow, and good which no one, who has even in the smallest degree partaken of, would barter for the whole world itself.

But there is an epithet which the apostle employs in describing these riches, that magnifies the value and importance of them. He calls them 'the *unsearchable* riches of Christ.' The word literally means that which is so hidden

that you cannot find any track to guide you to it. But it is also employed to signify what cannot be fully comprehended or explained; not what there is no trace to lead you to, but what, when you have lighted upon it, you cannot wholly explore. And this is the meaning of the expression in the text, 'The unsearchable riches of Christ.' We are not left without marks to enable us to find our way to Him in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and of knowledge; but when we have taken advantage of these leading marks, and have been conducted to the object of our desire, we feel that there are depths and heights in that mystery of godliness which the Scripture unfolds, that pass our highest conceptions, while they satisfy the most ardent longings of our souls.

In addressing you from this text, I would speak, in the first place, of the riches of Christ; in the second place, of some of the reasons for which they may be called unsearchable; and in the third place, of what sinners must do for the purpose of getting into the right track to seek after them.

I. In the first place, we have to speak of the 'riches of Christ.' This topic is our chief concern at present, and, of itself, might well occupy our whole time; and when we had said all that language could express respecting it, we would still be only at the threshold of the subject, only at the mouth of the unfathomable mine. But let us endeavour, so far as our brief space will allow, to set forth some little part of what the Scripture reveals to us on this highest and best of all subjects of contemplation. We may arrange our remarks under the two following heads: First, the riches of Christ may have reference to what He *is* in Himself; and secondly, to what He *actually imparts*. And first, let us speak of the riches of Christ, limiting our view to what He is in Himself. Now here there is enough to engage our thoughts in this one consideration, that Christ, as Mediator between God and man, is to the Church on earth *the representative* of the Father, and to the inhabitants of heaven *the representative of the Church* on earth. 'In Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.' 'He that hath seen Him hath seen the Father.' 'He is the image of the invisible God.' These passages prove



sufficiently that He is the representative of the Father to us. And then, again, we are expressly taught, that as the high priest went into the most holy place, bearing on his breast-plate the names of the twelve tribes of Israel, so 'Christ is passed into heaven, the holy place not made with hands, there to appear in the presence of God for us.' Thus is He the representative of the Church to the inhabitants of heaven. Now it is in that wonderful constitution of His person, as God-man, which fits Him to be the representative of the Father to the Church, and of the Church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, that we perceive with what peculiar significance He may be spoken of as having all riches dwelling in Him. Infinite power and wisdom and love—in a word, every perfection of the Godhead is in Him; and yet when you look, you see only a man, who stretches out His hand to you as a friend, and invites you to come to Him, that you may share with Him in all that He possesses. You need the interposition of an Almighty friend to restore you to the favour of God, which you have forfeited. And here is the *person*, and the only person in the universe, who can—Jesus Christ, our Lord. And observe how He accomplishes the work, that you may the more clearly perceive, and the more fervently adore, the riches which are hid in Him as Mediator. If we look to Christ exclusively as a *divine person*, in whom all the perfections of the Godhead dwell, we find the same barrier between Him and ourselves, as individuals of a guilty and ruined race, that rises up when we think of the infinite justice and truth and holiness of the Eternal Father. But when we look to Him wearing our nature, which He has taken into union with His divine person, and *that* for the very purpose of accomplishing the work of redemption, then we come to understand what *the riches are* which are so emphatically pointed to by the apostle. We perceive the Son of God assuming our nature, that He might be able to do what in the divine nature, separately, He could not have done; that He might find a fitting way, if we may venture so to speak, to bring all the divine perfections to bear harmoniously upon that marvellous work of salvation, from which comes glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, and good-will to the children of men.

Let this be noted especially, that it is in connection with our Lord's relating Himself to mankind, by appearing on earth as a man, that He is said to have been full of grace and truth, yea, and to have all fulness dwelling in Him, and that thus He could perform what, as a divine person alone, He could not have effected. You will understand my meaning better from a passage in the Epistle to the Hebrews. The apostle, speaking of the priesthood of Christ, says, 'Every high priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices; wherefore it is of necessity that *He* (Christ) should have somewhat also to offer.' Now what could He offer, viewed exclusively as the eternal Son of God? He could not give away justice, that mercy might be exalted. He could not make a sacrifice of truth and holiness, and the honour of the divine law, and the majesty of the Lawgiver, that sinners might escape from the threatened punishment, and from the curse that lay upon them. That could not be. And accordingly the apostle tells us afterwards what it was that, as a Priest, our Lord had to offer. 'When He cometh into the world,' He saith, 'sacrifice and offering Thou wouldst not, but a body hast Thou prepared me.' In consequence of being thus furnished with His offering, *as a man* He could render obedience for men; in the flesh He could suffer the penalty that was due to sinful men; having a soul and body like our own, but sinless, He could die to satisfy the law and to destroy death.

Now we can comprehend in some measure what *the riches of Christ* are, viewed separately from what may well be termed the infinite and inconceivable riches of the Godhead.

'God is love;' and Christ did not purchase the Father's love for sinners; it is to the Father's love, on the contrary, that the whole scheme of redemption is to be traced. The fountain of divine unfathomable love was always the same; but now, through Christ, that fountain flows toward us poor miserable transgressors, for our refreshment, and to make us blessed. The love of God out of Christ is something to be read of; something to be seen, although but dimly. The love of God *in Christ* is something that can be seen as in the sunlight; and, what is better still, something that can be *felt* as resting upon ourselves.

Again, God is just, rendering to every one according to his

works ; and Christ did not come into the world to render the divine justice a nullity. But what can a sinner do in the contemplation of the divine justice, but tremble and seek to hide himself ? Look to Christ, however, and observe the manifestation of justice in Him. He so reverences that glorious attribute, that He condescends to appear on earth in our nature for the vindication of it. And He so satisfies it by His voluntary obedience unto death, that it has not now a claim to urge against one of those who are represented by Him, and who believe in His name. Justice *out of Christ* is like the cherubim accompanied with flaming swords to keep the way of the tree of life. Justice as seen *in Christ* is like the cherubim that stood above the mercy-seat in the tabernacle, as if proclaiming, that because atoning blood had been shed, their work was done, and their swords were sheathed. Justice *out of Christ* condemns and slays, demanding its proper right ; justice *in Christ* acquits and saves, having obtained its right to the full. Once more, God is omnipotent. The simple expression of His will sways all the elements of nature. How awful, then, to a sinner is this tremendous attribute ! *Out of Christ*, he cannot view it, if he view it rightly, but as ready to crush him, because he lies under the displeasure of Jehovah. But Christ is called the *power* of God unto salvation. And *in Him* the divine power is illustrated in such a way that no other display of it affords any parallel to this. The simple exercise of power cannot make a guilty creature innocent, nor can it make a polluted creature blessed. It cannot cancel the sentence passed against sinners by that law which is founded upon the very nature of God. All these things are beyond the province of *mere power*. But through Christ they are all accomplished. He stood in the place of the guilty, procuring for them the privilege to be held as innocent. By His grace the polluted are cleansed, and thus made blessed. By Him the sentence of the law hath been wiped away, while yet the law itself is magnified and made honourable. Out of Christ, then, the divine power is terrible ; in Christ it brings deliverance. Out of Christ, it is heaven's lightning to scorch and to consume the guilty ; in Christ, it is seen providing for them a hiding-place from the storm, and a covert from the tempest.

Out of Christ, it pursues the track of the sinner with deserved vengeance; in Christ, we behold it making all things work together for good to them that love God. In the same manner I might refer to all the rest of the divine perfections as manifested in Christ, for the purpose of unfolding somewhat the meaning of the expression, 'The riches of Christ;' but the theme is boundless. Our main object in what has been stated has been this, that you might perceive the difference between the fulness or the riches of the Redeemer, viewed in His divine nature alone, as the eternal Son of God, and the fulness or riches of Christ, God-man, the Mediator, and the *representative of the Father* to the Church. And that difference lies principally here: that while love and justice and power, and all the other glorious attributes of the Godhead, belong to Christ essentially, considered as God; yet it is only when we look to Him as God-man, the Mediator, that we behold these attributes manifested so as to attract us toward Him. The love of Christ, justice honoured and satisfied by Christ, power wielded by Christ, the believer can rejoice in, because all these perfections are combined to promote his own special good. But now, we must not overlook the important consideration, that as in Christ, in His person as God-man, the representative of the Father to the Church, we have all the perfections of the Godhead shining forth so gloriously as we could have never otherwise beheld them; so we must also look to Him as the representative of the Church to the inhabitants of heaven, in order to get even such an imperfect glimpse as can be obtained in this world of all the riches that are hid in Him. Every descendant of Adam, in consequence of the Fall, lies polluted and degraded. Even in the fairest forms in which human nature can be presented to us upon earth, there is so much corruption cleaving to it, that if we were not so deeply defiled by sin ourselves, it would be loathsome in our sight. But mark the condescension of the Son of God. He takes human nature into immediate and personal union with the divine; He is found in fashion as a man; and not only does He sojourn on earth, known by the humble title of the Man Christ Jesus, but He carries that nature into heaven and wears it there, being not ashamed to own relationship to

our fallen race in the midst of all heaven's glory. And how beautiful, how noble, how dignified, is the human nature as seen in Christ! With a perfection which could not be challenged did He fulfil every precept of the law of love, and with a sympathy which angels cannot feel did He mitigate the distresses of suffering men while He lived with them below. And now that He is exalted, must not the powers and principalities in the heavenly places look with a different eye upon human nature from what they did before, and count it not unworthy to be received into their high and holy companionship? But why does Christ wear our nature in heaven? For this, certainly, among other reasons, that we may have thereby a pledge of our own exaltation, if we are His people. What He has done for degraded humanity by taking it into union with Himself, He can and will do for every one who believes in Him. We know that the bodies of His people will be fashioned like to His own glorious body. We know that their souls will also be transformed into His image by the indwelling and working of His Holy Spirit; and as the hosts of heaven adore Him, invested with the human nature as He is, they will not scorn to hold fellowship with us when we are like Him; neither will we be ashamed to appear among them when He claims us as His kindred.

2. But we must now pass from the consideration of the riches of Christ with reference to what *He is in Himself*, to speak of them with reference to what He *imparts*. Under the former head we felt a difficulty in obtaining suitable expressions to describe what is so far beyond the reach of our most elevated conceptions; but in the present case our difficulty is in selecting, out of the numberless blessings which Christ bestows, a few of the more prominent. We find ourselves here introduced, as it were, into a storehouse filled even to the overflowing with the choicest rarities and precious things, which meet our view on every side; and we are so dazzled by the prospect, that when we are asked which of these precious things is the best, verily we feel ourselves at a loss to answer. We see a poor, naked, helpless, and wretched creature brought by the divine Spirit into this storehouse. He is overwhelmed with confusion, and afraid to lift up his head; and so he may,

for he is covered all over with disease, as if he had just been taken from some lazar-house, and carried without any previous preparation into this place of riches and magnificence. But he is led in, in spite of all the worthlessness and wretchedness that might have been supposed sufficient to bar the door against him. And now, look at him after he has been in Christ's storehouse. He has been washed in the costly bath of Christ's blood, which has been fitted up there for the use of sinners; he has been clothed, so that you would not know him now, if you had seen him in his rags before. His new raiment, which is Christ's righteousness covering him, is such an exchange for the paltry and tattered garb which he formerly wore, that he himself is altogether concealed; you perceive only the robe of righteousness. And then, besides, he is adorned with various other ornaments. He is beautified with Christ's comeliness put upon him. All things are made new. 'Love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, fidelity, meekness, and temperance,' are wrought in him, instead of the corruptions and vile and degrading passions and feelings of the old nature. So that while he was carried into the divine storehouse a creature loathsome and polluted and miserable, he comes out adorned like one of the children of a king; while he was carried in guilty and accused and defiled, he comes out washed and justified and sanctified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God. But we must endeavour to particularize the riches of Christ. Those which He has to bestow, and which He does bestow, are all the benefits contained in the covenant of grace. These are the blessings of Christ's purchase. He was so rich that He could give a price to acquire them, and the right to bestow them. So that when we are sent to preach the riches of Christ, we have a large commission, and need not be stinted in our offers. We feel ourselves warranted to summon together all who have any spiritual want, and to tell them that here it may be supplied out of the glorious riches of God in Christ Jesus. And, accordingly, we would this day invite all *sinners* to come and partake of the riches of *pardoning mercy* which are to be found in Him. This invitation we would make as broad as possible. There is no sinner here who is beyond the reach of Christ's

power to save, however aggravated his sins may be. Bring hither the darkest catalogue of transgressions you can, and there is virtue in the blood of Christ to blot all out. Some of you look up as if you could not be comprehended within the embrace of mercy which we speak of. Are you heinously guilty? We dare not shut you out for that reason, because we would thus undervalue the preciousness of Christ's blood. Have you been very rebellious? We cannot say that there is no mercy for you, because we know that rebels as reckless have been pardoned. The riches of Christ's mercy are so boundless that no one must think himself beyond the reach of them; they are so *free* that all may take them; and they are so varied that, be the peculiar character of the sinner what it may, they will be found suitable to him.

Again, we would invite specially all those to come and partake of Christ's riches who have found the world's pleasures and enjoyments delusive. It is not every one that would deal with you so generously as Christ does. He might leave you to reap the fruits of your folly without hope; He might suffer you to perish among the husks which you have chosen. But He is tender-hearted and full of compassion; and though you have squandered all—time, strength, substance, body, soul—in the service of sin, He will not yet lose sight of you. Come to Him, all impoverished and wretched as you are, and He will give you better things than those which you have been accustomed to set your heart upon. One thing we can promise He will give you, which you have never yet found, although you have been always seeking it, and that is, *solid satisfaction* and comfort of soul, grounded upon His standing between you and the wrath which you have deserved; and if you will not receive His gift, we must leave you still under wrath. But, my friends, in thus giving forth the invitation to sinners generally, and to worldlings in particular, to come and partake of the riches of Christ, we are in danger of forgetting the vastness and variety of the riches. We have only reached the door of the great treasure-house, in speaking of the pardoning mercy which is offered to sinners through the Lord Jesus. Come and let us endeavour to penetrate farther, for the farther we go the more satisfied we shall be that Christ alone can

make men blessed. *There* is one believer dejected because he has been overcome by the enemy : Christ gives him strength to conquer. *There* is another creeping onward and afraid to look up, because he feels himself so unworthy : Christ takes him by the hand, and lifts him up, saying, ‘ Be of good cheer, I am with thee.’ There is another awfully tempted by the wicked one : Christ whispers to him, ‘ Greater is He that is for you than all that can be against you.’ There is another who thinks God has forsaken him : Christ says, ‘ Can the mother forget her child ? She may, but I will not forget thee.’ There is another laid down upon the sickbed, and apparently very comfortless ; but Christ says, ‘ This is for your good,’ and the sufferer feels it. Another is on the deathbed, and that is terrible ; but Christ can make the deathbed easy, for He has destroyed death and him that had the power of it. *Peace* is a good thing : Christ left it as a legacy to His people. Men would be joyful : Christ gives His people a joy that is unspeakable and full of glory. Holiness is the brightest ornament that man can wear : Christ makes His people holy as He Himself is holy. Life is above all other things precious ; and Christ gives eternal life. The life of believers is hid with Christ in God. My friends, we are not speaking in parables, but the words of truth and soberness. We might have drawn a picture of what a believer will be, enriched with all the fulness of Christ. We might have glanced at what the Scripture unfolds of the world to come ; and with the discoveries which it sets before us of the glory of the redeemed, we might have endeavoured to illustrate the riches of Christ. But let us be contented in the meantime with a humbler theme. We suppose the case of one converted to Christ, being before thoughtless, careless, ignorant. What a change is wrought upon that man ! He knows and understands the truth : who gave him the knowledge but Christ ? He becomes a different man in *all* his dealings from what he was before : who makes him so but Christ ? He is willing to do anything by which the honour of God may be advanced : who gives him the will but Christ ? And if His grace can make such change upon a man, that even in this world he may be called a new creature, oh, what will the issue be when we see that countless multi-



tude gathered around the throne with palms in their hands? If the conversion and protection and guiding to glory of one believer is so wonderful, what will the result be when we see the whole family of the redeemed gathered together in one? Will not this be our fitting exercise, if we are among the redeemed, to cast our crowns and our palms at the Saviour's feet, ascribing to Him all the glory of our salvation?

II. We have not spoken of the *riches* of Christ as they should have been exhibited; but we must turn from this part of the subject to consider what was to be the second topic of our discourse, why the apostle calls these riches *unsearchable*. And here we have only time to offer a few remarks. Many other epithets might be suitably applied to them. We might speak of them as unspeakably *precious*, as *incorruptible*, as most satisfying; indeed, whatever term expressive of excellence is employed by men to characterize the objects they chiefly prize, may be applied to the riches of Christ, with this feeling, that here it is impossible to exaggerate. But as the apostle uses the one word *unsearchable*, we shall restrict ourselves to that.

1. And I remark, in the first place, that the riches of Christ may be called unsearchable, because they cannot be found out *without divine teaching*. 'The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.' It is vain to speak, as some do, of the power of divine truth itself to enlighten men's minds. It has an excellency to please, it has a variety to excite wonder, it has a majesty to make the soul stand in awe; but it has no efficacy in itself to make sinners wise to salvation. The Word without the Spirit is like the earth without the sun. There is no colour and no beauty on the earth's surface at midnight. But when the sun rises, all is resplendent with beauty, from the green grass to the flower of finest tint. And just so, you may have read the Scripture from beginning to end, you may know what it reveals; but you cannot feel the excellency of the truth, and you cannot feel the preciousness of Christ, until the Spirit lift off the veil from your under-

standing and from your heart; and then Christ is all in all, the wisdom of God and the power of God unto salvation.

2. But secondly, the riches of Christ may be called unsearchable, because even when we have been brought to feel that they are the true riches, and to desire them as our chief good, we can only in the present life obtain a dim conception of their whole worth. We do not mean that Christ has not power to give, or that He does not actually give, to those who believe in Him what He has purchased for them. He gives them as much as makes them truly blessed. Even when they have not the full assurance that they are His, and when they are fighting their way amidst fears and doubts and perplexities, they have as much comfort in Christ as to be able to say that they would not part with Him for all they have besides. But even with all the helps which God hath given them in His Word to comprehend the glory of Christ's person and the nature of His work, they feel themselves, as it were, lost in a boundless maze of mysteries. They see Him in the first promise, bruising the head of the serpent; they see Him in the bush burning but not consumed; they see Him in the passover lamb; they see Him in the services of the great day of atonement, when one goat was slain, and the other set free in the wilderness, prefiguring His death and His resurrection; they see Him in Gethsemane; they see Him on the cross, making expiation for sin, laying down His life, because He had power to lay it down and to take it up again; and, what is far better, they can trace the divine handwriting in all that points to Jesus; and better still, they can testify from experience that Christ can ease the conscience of the burden of dead works, can give pardon, can fill the soul with peace and hope and joy, can make the bounties of providence objects of real enjoyment, and can turn afflictions themselves into blessings; but after all, they are like the queen of Sheba, when she said to Solomon, What I have heard is not half the reality. There are interruptions to the believer's peace, there are clouds that obscure the full sunshine of his hope and joy, there are evil influences which turn away his heart from that which he best loves; so that he sees while in the present world but as through a glass, dimly; and though he can honestly declare

that in Christ are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, still he must acknowledge that they are past his finding out.

3. And then, thirdly, the riches of Christ may be called unsearchable, because we shall never, even through eternity, be able to fathom the love of God in Christ Jesus. Certainly we shall see Christ,—every eye shall see Him. We shall know more than we now do, for we shall see Him face to face. We shall understand better than we can do here the mystery of the scheme of redemption; we shall be more deeply read in the divine counsels; we shall comprehend more clearly all the movements of the divine providence; we shall adore more fervently and undividedly the King of saints, who wears our nature. But, my friends, whatever insight God gives us into His other works, and whatever liberty He shall allow us to scan the whole field of creation, and to learn the mysteries of His power and wisdom and goodness, as they are manifested throughout His boundless universe, of this we are assured, that we shall never comprehend, although we shall still with growing wonder and delight adore, the great mystery of godliness—God manifest in the flesh, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.

III. But now, in the last place, I would for a moment speak of what sinners must do to get into the right track for seeking after the riches of Christ. A word or two is all that I can here advance, and from what has been already said, what we are now to say may be anticipated. To ascertain the riches of Christ, it might be thought the best and surest method of procedure to go to the divine Word, where all that can be known of them is revealed. And thus far we would feel ourselves warranted to give counsel to any inquirer after Christ: If you can find Him anywhere, you will find Him in the Word of God. But after all, though you find Him spoken of there, though you can trace Him there from the first promise down to Calvary, you will not find Him there so as to be yourselves saved by Him, without special aid from on high. And therefore we would give this counsel to any one who would get into the track which conducts to the riches of

Christ : Put yourself into the Spirit's hand, for it is His office to guide you to the Son, and through the Son to the Father. And let this be specially observed, that you must cast away all dependence upon everything which men count valuable and excellent, and commit yourselves to the Spirit's guidance, as poor, and wretched, and blind, and miserable, and naked. The truth is, my friends, that to get into the pathway which conducts to the divine treasury, you must leave all else behind. You must be contented to forsake all sin, although it may involve a hard sacrifice ; yea, you must be contented to put self away, and to take Christ for all. And of this we are confident, that though the way to glory is hard and difficult, and the temptations to turn out of it are too strong for mere flesh and blood, you will reach the glory, you will get the treasure, by the Spirit's help.

In conclusion, we would not forget that this passage is written in the Scripture : 'The riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.' The riches of Christ consist not only in what He has in Himself, and what He has a right to bestow, but also in what He has purchased. His people are part of His riches. This is perhaps in one sense the most wonderful department of the whole subject. How creatures in themselves so worthless and so defiled, yea, all over so disfigured by the foul leprosy of sin, as to be unfit, it might be thought, to be looked upon by Him who is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity,—how they should be so prized by Christ as to be called by Him His peculiar treasure, His inheritance, His spouse, His beloved, is certainly most marvellous. But the wonder is partly accounted for, when we remember that He gave Himself for them in order that He might be able to present them to His Father without spot or wrinkle, reflecting the light and glory of His own blessed image. Oh, my friends, if ye are Christ's indeed, if ye have been washed from guilt in His blood, and have His Spirit dwelling in you, whatever may be your condition in the present life, and with whatever contempt and hatred you may be treated by a world which knows you not, even as it knew not Christ, you are precious here as part of His inheritance, and a glorious destiny

awaits you. He is in Himself boundlessly rich ; but not satisfied with that, He is gathering in from this world day by day jewels that will add to the lustre of His mediatorial crown. And when the last has been gathered in, then will come the great marriage of the King's Son, when all His riches and glory and dignity will be exhibited before the universe. There will be a grand procession that day of all His ransomed ones. And if you are among the ransomed, you will be in that bright and blessed company. It is thus described by the Spirit, and language cannot rise higher : ' The King's daughter is all glorious : within her clothing is of wrought gold. She shall be brought unto the King in raiment of needlework : the virgins her companions that follow her shall be brought unto Thee. With gladness and rejoicing shall they be brought : they shall enter into the King's palace.' Yes, and they shall abide there for ever, for ' they go no more out.' Amen.

## XXI.

### CHRIST IN HIS PEOPLE THE HOPE OF GLORY.

‘Christ in you, the hope of glory.’—COL. 1. 27.

IT may be well that we occupy a few moments, first of all, in tracing the connection between the text and the preceding context. The apostle, after having exhibited the glory of Christ as God manifest in the flesh, which is the *great* mystery of our religion, proceeds to speak of another mystery connected with His manifestation, viz. the doctrine that the blessings of redemption through Christ were designed to be as free to the Gentiles as to the Jews. This *we* would not be disposed to consider as a mystery now, but it was so then. It is declared, ver. 26, to be a mystery hidden from ages and generations, that the Gentiles should form a part of the Church of God; or, as it is expressed in the Epistle to the Ephesians, where the same subject is treated of, that ‘they should be fellow-heirs, and of the same body, and partakers of the divine promise in Christ by the gospel.’ And let us look to the fact. With the single exception of Jonah’s mission to the men of Nineveh, which was designed with all its accompaniments to be a standing reproof to the kingdoms of Judah and Israel, for their unbelief and impenitence and daring impiety, —with this single exception, God’s messages were addressed exclusively to the descendants of Abraham, and the Gentiles were left, as it seemed, in impenetrable darkness and hopeless misery. No prophet was sent to enlighten them; no offer of mercy was held out to them. It was intimated, indeed, by some of the prophets that they would be received into the Church; but the prevailing notion among the Jews was, that to *them* were to be limited the benefits of Messiah’s reign. And hence, when Peter was sent to preach to Cornelius, who

was the first Gentile convert to the faith of Christ, he required a special vision from heaven to remove his prejudices and teach him the path of duty. And when Paul was addressing the multitude at Jerusalem, and recounting the circumstances of his conversion, they heard him patiently until he announced that the Lord had sent him to make known the truth to the Gentiles. 'They gave him audience unto this word, and then lifted up their voices, and said, Away with such a fellow from the earth: for it is not fit that he should live.' We can perceive, then, why there should be so many references made in Paul's epistles to the calling of the Gentiles as a mystery hidden from ages and generations; and how, when unquestionable evidence was given of the progress of the truth, and of the sanctifying power of the truth among them, the apostle should say, as in the text, that the very riches of the glory of this mystery, the fulness, the very climax of it, was in the Colossian converts, as in other converts from heathen darkness and iniquity, Christ the hope of glory. It is unnecessary to say more in the way of opening up the connection between the text and the foregoing verses. But in reality, when we, who have not the same kind of prejudices darkening our minds which the Jews felt, come to reflect upon the whole method of salvation, upon the sovereign love which planned it, upon the marvellous means by which it was accomplished—through the death and resurrection of Christ, and upon the application of the purchased blessings by the work of the Holy Ghost, we are lost in wonder, and cannot but confess, that if it was to the Jews a mystery that the Son of God should offer salvation to the Gentiles, it is a mystery as great, as much surpassing all that man could have anticipated, that any poor sinner should be so dignified, and so exalted, as to have Christ in him the hope of glory. These words, then, 'Christ in you, the hope of glory,' are to form the subject of our meditations on this occasion.

We have a very wide field of remark laid out before us in these few words. The converted, and the unconverted too, have lessons to learn from them. First of all, before we come to particulars, let me ask you to consider the text just as it presents itself to us when we first read it. It is suggestive of

as many trains of thought as there are words ; more especially when the Spirit tells us that we are contemplating a mystery hidden before from ages and generations. '*Christ—in you—the hope of glory.*' The beginning of the mystery is *Christ*. This very name embodies all that the prophet meant when he said, 'His name shall be called Wonderful.' *Christ* is the official designation of the Son of God as the Servant of the Father, working out the redemption of sinners. The name, *Christ*, when we stop to think of the real meaning of it, places before our minds the doctrine respecting the incarnation of the Eternal Word, and the offices which, as God manifest in the flesh, He executed, and still executes for the recovery of the lost. The Son of God is called *Christ*, because He was set apart to perform a work which could only be performed by one wearing the human nature ; and as the Holy Ghost prepared that body and soul which the Lord assumed into union with His divine person, He is said to have been anointed with the Holy Ghost without measure. And it is as thus anointed that He is called the *Christ*, and that He is qualified, wearing our nature, to be our Kinsman-Redeemer, our Prophet, our High Priest, and our King. In the very name of *Christ* there may be said to be concentrated the whole sum and substance of the great mystery of godliness.

But then, again, the word says, '*Christ in you ;*' and here is another mystery. We must mark the expression carefully, as the frigid and dry exposition which is given of it by some of our commentators strips it both of significance and of life. They would have the apostle's meaning to be merely this, that the preaching of the doctrine of *Christ* among the Gentiles, as the Redeemer from wrath to come, and the bestower of eternal glory, is the mystery which is to be contemplated with so much wonder. We shall have occasion by and by to advert more particularly to this view. But in the meantime, let it be observed that the terms, '*Christ in you,*' express much more than *Christ* made known to you through the preaching of the gospel. They are of very frequent occurrence in the New Testament, and they imply the closest possible relationship. Surely there is much more signified than the bare preaching of the Word among a people, when



the Lord says, 'If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him;' and much more surely denoted than the mere fact that gospel doctrine is proclaimed, when He says in His intercessory prayer, 'I in them, and Thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that Thou hast sent me, and hast loved them as Thou hast loved me.' Christ in a man, is Christ received by that man as his Saviour, imparting to him evidences of His love, counting him a very portion of Himself, and reigning in his heart, as having purchased the right to enjoy the supremacy there, by the sacrifice of Himself, which He offered on Calvary. It is wonderful that there should be such connection between the eternal Son of God and any of the children of men; but the Scripture certifies the fact, and we have abundant reason to rejoice in it.

Then, once more, the word says, '*Christ in you, the hope of glory*;' and this is the consummation of the mystery. The terms imply much more than that Christ hath brought life and immortality to light by His gospel, making certain the truth, that man is to live for ever in the world to come, and that there is an inheritance, incorruptible and undefiled, laid up for the people of God. They manifestly mean that all those in whom Christ is, have such a conviction wrought in them of the reality of the future glory, that it furnishes matter of present comfort and enjoyment and refreshment to their souls; just as when a man is journeying to the home from which he has long been absent, his heart feasts upon the joy that awaits him, when he shall have clasped in his arms those whose image has been for many a weary year vividly engraven on his heart.

Such, then, is at a general glance the interpretation we would put upon the mystery which the apostle opens up to us in the text, when he represents Christ as being in His people 'the hope of glory.' And we would now, looking for the Spirit's help, proceed to consider more particularly some of the interesting truths which this passage is designed to teach us. The great doctrine which we have to illustrate is, that there is between Christ and His people such a relation-

ship established, that He is said to be *in* them; and that, in virtue of this relationship, He is to them the hope of glory. Then we may comprise the remarks which we have to offer under the following heads: first, we would speak of the relationship between Christ and His people, as expressed by the words, that 'He is *in* them;' secondly, we would point out some of the general results which flow from this relationship; thirdly, and more especially, we would endeavour to show how, in virtue of the relationship subsisting between Him and them, Christ is to His people the hope of glory; and then, fourthly, we would make application of the whole doctrine to the condition and prospects of the converted and the unconverted.

I. In the first place, we would speak of the relationship between Christ and His people, as expressed by the words, that 'He is *in* them.' We have already adverted, in passing, to the cold and unsatisfactory view which is taken of the text by many expositors, as if the apostle's object had merely been to inform us that the offer of eternal life through Jesus Christ to the Gentiles was the mystery which had been hid from ages and generations. That it is to be regarded as being so in part, there can be no question; but the statement in the text has reference to something beyond this, something more deeply affecting the present and everlasting interests of individual men. Upon this subject we must dwell for a little, that the import of the text may be fully understood and felt.

There is, then, let it be particularly marked, a twofold revelation of Christ made to sinners. There is the general exhibition which is given of Him in the Word of God, in all His suitableness to remedy the misery into which man as a sinner has plunged himself; and there is the peculiar discovery which is made of Him to the soul by the Spirit, when He is received in all His suitableness, as the very Saviour whom 'that soul requires. The distinction between the two things may be made sufficiently plain when we put it thus, that in one case Christ is revealed *to* the sinner, and in the other possible. He is revealed *in* him; as when the apostle says, than the Father to reveal His Son *in* me, that I might preach

Him among the heathen.' Let us advert to two things. All that we need to know of the Redeemer is so clearly unfolded to us in the Scripture, that if we remain in ignorance, it can only be because we love the darkness rather than the light. We read that, being in the form of God, and thinking it not robbery to be equal with God, He took upon Him the form of a servant, and was found in fashion as a man; that having power over His own life to lay it down and to take it up again, He laid it down as a ransom for many; that there is now redemption for sinners through His blood, even forgiveness of sins according to the riches of the grace of God; that being raised from the dead, and exalted to the Father's right hand, He has power given to Him over all flesh, to grant eternal life to as many as the Father hath given Him; and that, having prepared a place for His people, He will come again, to take them to Himself, that where He is there they may be also. These statements, which are placed before us as the testimony of God Himself concerning His Son, it is impossible for us, except wilfully, to misunderstand. And then, besides, how varied are the descriptions given of the nature of Christ's office, and of His work, as if for the purpose of meeting every possible view that can be taken of the condition and the wants of man as a fallen creature! Does the Scripture represent us as spiritually diseased, covered all over with the foul leprosy of sin? then it tells us that He is the great Healer, whose blood cleanseth from all sin. Does it describe us as in bondage to iniquity, and to the wicked one? then it points to Him as invested with power to loose our bands, and to set us free, saying, 'If the Son make you free, ye shall be free indeed.' Does it speak of us as lost? then it speaks of Him as having come to seek and to save the lost. Does it startle us with the announcement, that as sinners we lie under the wrath and curse of the Eternal? then it teaches us that He submitted to become a curse for us, that the blessing of God might descend and rest upon us. Does it say that we are dead in sin? then it says also, that in Him is life; and that whosoever hath the Son of God, hath life eternal, and abideth in him.

And then, still further, how beautiful and attractive is, a relation-

colours in which it portrays His character! Full of grace and truth, compassionate to the most wretched, loving the souls of sinners with such intensity as to give Himself an offering that He might deliver them from the doom they merited: such is Christ revealed in the Word to us, and pressed on our acceptance by the Father, who, with audible voice, declared twice from heaven, 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him.' But what is the effect of this revelation, and how do the greater part of men deal with it? It lies as a dead letter before them, neither touching their affections, nor animating their hopes, nor softening their rebellious will, which is enmity against God. True, it must be acknowledged, there is a kind of passive acquiescence in the general terms of it, and an admission of the truth that eternal life is to be obtained through Jesus Christ; but practically, and in as far as any well-grounded expectation of glory, honour, and immortality is concerned, Christ as merely revealed to sinners in the Word, remains without form or comeliness, or any beauty wherefore He should be desired. But now we turn to our other topic, the revelation of Christ, not to the man, but *in* the man. And how different the scene which we have here to contemplate! It is as if we were carried all at once from a region where death and corruption held carnival, to a place instinct with life, and radiant with heavenly light. We are introduced now to the consideration of the momentous doctrine of the Holy Spirit's work. He it is who taught the sacred penmen to write what they have written of Christ in the Word. But thus far His work can only be likened to that of the artist, whose picture, although perfect, is exhibited to the blind. Nothing could be added to the finished portrait of the Redeemer which the Spirit lays before us in the Scripture; nothing could be taken away without marring the whole. The colouring is most harmonious, every part is complete, and all the parts together are perfect. But still, alas, it is a picture presented to the blind; and as they cannot perceive its excellences, so they can neither feel admiration nor love in connection with it. It is the prerogative of the Spirit, however, to open the blind eyes. Then He puts forth His sovereign energy upon the heart and soul of some

poor and needy one whom He has taught to feel his wants, and gives him power to discern the beauty and the glory of the Saviour, the perfect adaptation of the Saviour's work to all his necessities as a sinner, estranged from God, condemned, helpless, and polluted ; and enables him to perform that greatest of all works which sinful, mortal man can perform—enables him, now that he can look on Christ as He is revealed in the Word, to believe in Him, to take Him to his heart, as Christ offered to himself, and given to himself to save him. The Lord Jesus said, ' When He, the Spirit, is come, He will take of mine, and will show it unto you.' This did not mean that anything was to be added by the Spirit to what the Scripture, when it was completed, should contain respecting the doctrine of Christ, but that there would be, under the New Testament economy, which is the ministration of the Spirit, such an exhibition made of the Redeemer to the soul quickened by the Spirit, and gifted with power to take hold of Him, that the result follows, Christ is taken hold of by that soul, and is confided in as worthy to be entrusted with all its interests, and to have full dominion over it. Now this is the revelation of Christ *in* the man. Christ believed in, trusted, loved, submitted to, is what is to be understood by Christ *in* us. When, by the operation of the Spirit, the understanding is opened to perceive His suitableness, and His power and willingness to save ; and the heart is opened also to welcome Him, and take Him to its embrace ; then this, which is just another name for the exercise of faith, *this* is to transfer Christ, if we may so speak, *from* the Word *into* the heart of the believer, and to make Him a *living Lord*, reigning within a living man ! My friends, attend for a moment to this wondrous work and change which the Spirit produces, when His enlightening grace and life-imparting energy are put forth. You have all read about Christ in the Scripture, and you all know about Him. But can you say that He is yours, and that you are His ? If you can, then there is that union formed between Him and you which justifies the application of the expressions, that He is in you, and you *in* Him. And what do these expressions imply, if they are interpreted as language usually is, and with due allowance for the figure of speech in which the truth which they embody is

contained? We say, for example, that a principle is lodged in a man's heart, or dwells in him, when he is governed by it, living under its influence. We say the world is in such a man when the whole complexion of his life is worldly. We say a friend lives in the heart of his friend when the one, in the absence of the other, feels and acts as if he were present with him, as if his eye rested on him, as if he controlled and regulated all his movements. Now in all these respects there is relationship between Christ and those who believe in Him. His truth governs them, they live as in His presence. But there is yet more than this indicated by their having Him *in* them. We scarcely know how to express the idea without doing violence to language. The meaning not only is, that where a believer is, Christ is, to teach, and to strengthen, and to rule, but that every believer is as truly a part of Christ as that the Son of God wears the human nature, the evidence of His relationship to all who believe. He is the Head, they the members. That truth which has been lodged in my mind may be effaced; an influence which I have felt may be weakened or destroyed; the power of a friend's voice and look and counsels may be forgotten; but there can be no severing of the connection between Christ, the Head, and believers, the members of Christ. As He was, so must they be in the present world, sufferers: as He is, so must they be in the world to come, exalted.

We are here, indeed, speaking of a doctrine which, in some respects, is so far beyond our comprehension, that it is usually said the union between Christ, as the Head, and those who believe in Him, as His members, is a *mystical union*; which means that we cannot understand it. And certainly we cannot, although to deny the reality would be to reject God's testimony. How the Son of God, to whom the Father hath committed all power, should look down upon this miserable world, where He was treated as an outcast, a blasphemer, and one unworthy to live, and should say, pointing to this and that one, even in this assembly, This is my friend, my brother, my own, a member of my body, and of my flesh, and of my bones, hurt him, and you hurt me,—all this surpasses our comprehension. It is a truth as far beyond us, although not better cer-

tified than this, that the tears of contrition shed by His people Christ keeps in His bottle, that their groanings of spirit are in His book, that their very dust is dear to Him, and that as His property He will deliver it from the power of the grave. But we must not forget, that when it is said Christ is *in* His people, there is not only a doctrinal, but also a great practical truth enunciated. As the union between the head and the members in the body natural is kept up by the circulation of the same blood throughout the whole frame, even to the remotest extremity, so that the whole body is of one blood; in like manner, the Holy Spirit dwells in all who believe, quickening and moving even the feeblest and the most despised, so that all are of one spirit with the Lord, the living Head. And this indwelling and work of the Spirit, let it be observed, is not a mere link connecting the members with the Head; it is accompanied with an actual and a visible effect produced upon them, making them feel as the Head feels, love as the Head loves, sorrow as the Head sorrowed, rejoice as the Head rejoiced, and be willing to serve as the Head served the Father. We have come to a resting-place, then, in our discourse. Let us, in a few words, endeavour to set before you all that has been advanced. Christ as revealed in the Word to sinners may yet lie there unknown to them, and unsought by them. By the power of the Spirit they are led to perceive His glory, to feel their need of Him, and to embrace Him, so that He becomes their own Christ: no longer Christ offered *to* them, but Christ *in* them. They are then united to Him as His members, partaking of all the blessings which He has to bestow; and not only so, but they have His Spirit dwelling in them, making them of one spirit with Him, and assimilating them to Him in what they feel, and love, and hate, and aim at. This is all that the time enables us at present to speak of under our first head, the relationship between Christ and His people, signified by the expression in the text, '*Christ in you.*'

II. Now, in the second place, we come to point out some of the *general* results which flow from this relationship. Then we would call your attention in the outset, as helping us to a right conclusion here, to a form of expression very common in

the Scripture, which will enable us to understand sufficiently for our present purpose some of the principal benefits which believers have from their union to Christ, and also the way in which they obtain them. Corresponding to the terms that Christ is in His people, and bringing out in full the union which subsists between Him and them, we find it declared that they are *in Him*. There is a mutual indwelling: Christ *in them*, and they *in Him*. 'He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood,' *i.e.* as it is explained, 'he that cometh unto me, and believeth in me, dwelleth in me, and I in him.' 'In Christ Jesus, ye who sometime were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.' 'We know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us understanding, that we may know Him that is true: and we are *in Him* that is true, even in His Son, Jesus Christ.' But we need not quote further; the two forms of speech pervade the New Testament: Christ *in* the believer, and, reciprocally, the believer in Christ. Then with these general remarks, observe, first, some of the consequences which follow when the believer is regarded as being in Christ.

1. To be *in Christ*, is to have Christ interposed between you and the condemnation of the law. How terrible were the thunderings and lightnings that were heard and seen on the top of Mount Sinai when the law was given! The whole earth was shaken by the voice of the Almighty, and the light of the sun was obscured by that nearer and brighter effulgence which burst from Sinai on that day of the Lord. But all this is only as a dim shadow of what will be, when the great and terrible day of the Lord comes. Then, when every mouth is stopt, and all the unbelieving stand guilty and trembling before God, those who are in Christ will find shelter in Him; they will be hid from the wrath, as under the covert of His wings. Even *now* there is no condemnation to them; and *then* it will be asked triumphantly, 'Who is he that condemneth?'

2. Again, the believer as *in Christ* has really fulfilled the righteousness of the law, and answered all its demands, either for obedience or for punishment. 'Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.' Stop, poor



sinner, who art toiling to work out thy title to eternal life, here is good news for thee. Christ has made thy title good, if thou art indeed in Him. He has yielded in every respect the perfect fulfilment of its requirements which the law can claim. Stop and be satisfied with what He has done; Jehovah is satisfied with it, and so mayest thou be. This, my friends, is the very reasoning of Scripture. But we may just pause for a moment, and ask, how does the believer feel when he hears it addressed to him? Will he stop, do you think, and say there is no need of my obedience, when Christ has done all that is required? No; but he will say this, If Christ has done all this for me, I am Christ's henceforth and for ever. I will not stop. I will love more, I will serve better, I will submit more implicitly to the will of God, than in time past I have sought to do. 'What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits toward me?'

3. Again, the believer as *in* Christ stands accepted by the Father. It is now Jacob clad in the garments of the elder brother, the well-beloved, and receiving the Father's blessing. Jehovah looks upon Christ, and is pleased. Christ points to His people, the fruit of His soul's travail, and He is pleased with them also, for His sake. All that are in Christ are in-folded, wrapt up, as it were, in the ample robe of His righteousness. It is this perfect covering of righteousness that is seen, and not they themselves. The righteous Lord loveth righteousness; and those who were once miserable transgressors, but now believers, are accepted in virtue of the righteousness of the beloved, which covers them.

These plain consequences follow from the relationship between Christ and His people, when we look at them as *in* Him. But now, secondly, He is also *in* them; and from this view of the connection between them, other consequences follow not less important. Let us consider one or two of them generally.

1. First, then, Christ *in* the believer is the author of a new life in him. The first man, Adam, was made a living soul; the second Adam, the Lord from heaven, is rather a quickening spirit, because He imparts a new and spiritual life to His children. Now what is the leading charac-

teristic of the life which we derive from our connection with the first Adam, with him who is of the earth, earthly? Is it not alienation from God, such a course of thought, and feeling, and action, as has *scarcely any* reference to the divine authority, and no reference at all to the holiness of Jehovah? But what is the new, the spiritual life? It is just the reverse of the other: a life of nearness to God, a life for Him, a life regulated by His law, a life of divine service and of divine enjoyment. There are sympathies, likings and dislikings, and strong impulses manifested in the natural life—all, however, still true to nature, of the earth, earthly; and so there are sympathies and affections and impulses in the spiritual life, equally indicative of their origin from above—all showing that the children of God, quickened by Christ, have a new field opened up for their sympathy, new and better objects for their affections to rest upon, and new and holy impulses by which they are governed. The life which they now live in the flesh, Christ being in them, is not according to the flesh, but a life of faith upon the Son of God, who loved them, and gave Himself for them.

2. Again, Christ *in* the believer destroys the power of sin in him. It has been brought out already, in the previous part of our discourse, that to the formation of the union between Christ and the believer, there goes the willing and cordial acceptance of Christ as Lord and Sovereign in the heart. Now, He cannot reign where sin is enthroned; the very act of taking Him implies that sin is renounced, and that its iron dominion is at an end. And this is not a mere conclusion founded upon what might be supposed would probably result from such a connection as is formed between the Saviour and His believing people—He being in them, and they in Him. It is a fruit of their union absolutely necessary. Christ *in* the believer is Christ loved by the believer, and making known the reality of his love to Him. Sin, therefore, cannot have dominion, because there is a new and all-powerful principle brought into action, which positively and necessarily condemns and destroys it. Love to Christ in the heart of His people is to sin what the cross was to Christ Himself. His love for them brought Him to endure the cross, despising the shame.

Their love for Him leads them and helps them to crucify the old man with his lusts, which are corrupt. We read in the Acts of the Apostles, that when the Ephesians received the truth and embraced Christ, they brought together all their vile and deceptive books of magic, and cast them into the fire. And so the reception of Christ by the believer is the passing of the sentence of destruction upon sin, the immolation of that abominable thing which He hateth.

3. But once more, in the third place, Christ *in* the believer, Christ dwelling in the heart by faith, leads us to look for the transplantation of the graces which adorned Him into the believer,—for an assimilation of character between Him and them,—in a word, for the production of His likeness in them. This is the highest of all privileges. Everything else connected with salvation is but a help in the way onward to this. This is truly and really salvation itself. For a man to have Christ in him, so that all that man's feelings and actings shall show incontestably that he has Christ's image stamped upon him; for a man to give evidence, by his daily life and conduct, that he has received from Christ grace for grace, *i.e.* that there is not in Christ any excellency proper to Him as man which is not met by something corresponding to it, not in degree, but in kind, in His follower;—this is the highest attainable earthly privilege; this is the lifting up of earth as near as possible to heaven! To have the same mind in us which was also in Christ Jesus,—and this He gives us as dwelling in us by His Spirit,—is to be made partakers of the same blessedness which in higher measure is enjoyed in the upper sanctuary where Christ dwells.

Here, then, we have come to our second resting-place in this discourse; and in a few words let us retrace the ground which we have passed over. This is what we have spoken under the second head. Christ *in* the believer, implies the believer's being in Christ. Then, in consequence of this mutual relationship, there flows, *on the one hand*, from our being in Christ (if indeed we are in Him), freedom from the condemnation of the law, a perfect righteousness, and acceptance with God; and, *on the other hand*, from Christ's being in us (as He is indeed, if we are His people), our enjoyment of a

new spiritual life, the destruction of the power of sin in us, and the implantation in us of all the graces which adorned and dignified the character of Christ Himself.

III. Now we come, in the third place, to show particularly how, in virtue of the relationship between Him and them, Christ is to His people the hope of glory. And here we would call your attention to two particulars.

1. *First*, Christ *in* His people is the hope of glory, because, from their felt relationship to Him, the burden of guilt is removed from their conscience, and they are able with some confidence to look up to God as reconciled to them, and as their Friend and Father. What is it that begets all fears and suspicions of God, on the part of His creatures, but the consciousness of guilt in them? What is it that makes the future all dark to us, and crowds it with so many images of terror, but the feeling that we have sinned and deserved punishment? But now, when we have welcomed Christ as the Saviour, and taken Him to ourselves, and have Him dwelling in us, what does all this imply? Most unquestionably it implies this at the very least, that we have cast the burden of our sins on Him, knowing that He is able and willing to bear it. Then just as when a man who is pressed down by carrying a heavy weight can raise himself and look upward when that weight is removed, so the believer who has embraced Christ, and transferred to Him the weight of his iniquities, can look upward to heaven as no longer a region from which he is shut out.

All this seems to be sufficiently unquestionable, when we survey it as mere matter of doctrine. If a man has Christ *in* him, and by consequence is *in* Christ, then the Scripture assures us he has peace with God; and the Apostle Paul, describing his own experience, tells us, that he had not only peace, but 'could rejoice in the hope of the glory of God.' It were to impute falsehood to the testimony of the God of truth, to imagine for a moment that Christ has not secured the heavenly glory for all His people. It were an equal dishonour to His faithful word, to suppose that any man could be in Christ and have Christ in him, and after all come short of the heavenly glory. So far, then, as mere doctrine is concerned,

Christ in a man is the hope of glory to him, because He has not only removed every obstacle between him and the enjoyment of glory, but the very fact of their mutual relationship renders it as sure that the member will be glorified as that the Head has been.

But when we pass from the consideration of the question as matter of doctrine, and look at it experimentally, we come, if not as from the full sunlight into utter darkness, at least as into the dim twilight. We have observed already, that there is a vast difference between Christ revealed in the Word, and Christ revealed in the heart. And now we have to say, that there is a difference, although not of the same kind, yet as perceptible, between Christ as the ground of hope *in* one man, and Christ as the ground of hope in another. There is the simple-hearted and implicit faith, which casts all on Christ, and says, 'I know in whom I have believed.' Then with eagle-eye it can look upward, traversing, as at a glance, all the space between the present state of suffering and the future state of blessedness; and when it rests upon Christ glorified, as Stephen's eye did, when he cried, 'I see Him standing at the right hand of God,' it perceives no barrier between itself and Him, it needs no bridge across the gulf that separates eternity from time; it appropriates the truth, 'Where He is, there shall I be also.' But this is faith in its highest exercise, soaring on its strongest pinion, manifesting itself to be truly what the apostle describes it to be, when he calls it 'the very substance of things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen.' How different from all this is the timid and wavering look with which another turns to Jesus, knowing that He is trustworthy, and yet almost afraid to think that He will regard him; desiring to take Him, yea, taking Him, and yet not sure that Christ has accepted him! There is no eagle-eye here looking *upward*; the look is rather directed downward and inward, where all is darkness, and so there is corresponding fear and anxiety as to the attainment of the future glory.

We have referred to these two cases as the extremes, the highest and the lowest exercises of faith, as realizing the preciousness of Christ, and through Him anticipating the ever-

lasting enjoyment of God. But between these two extremes there is an endless diversity in the measures of strength wherewith faith puts itself forth, and therefore an endless diversity in the degrees of intensity with which the promised glory is seen and enjoyed in prospect. From the dim hope, which almost seems to be no hope, through the conflicting experience of good hope at one time and depressing fear at another, up to the full assurance of hope, you will find believers exercised with respect to the blessedness which God has in store for His people; their expectation being the more or less vivid as their faith is more or less vigorous. But in this respect there is no difference among them, that it is on Christ as their *own*, and on His finished work as having procured for them reconciliation with God, that their hope is founded. Feeling fluctuates; the believer is often like the barque when tossed by the storm, and apparently about to be swallowed up; but hope is the soul's anchor, and Christ is the object to which the anchor cleaves; and so, amid all the troubles and storms and darkness of this present time, there are glimpses of the coming glory, which bring with them wondrous comfort.

2. But in the second place, Christ in His people is the hope of glory, as living and reigning in them, and assimilating them to Himself. And here it is, my friends, that we come to the very pith and marrow of our whole subject. Let us dwell upon it for a little. Faith, as we have seen, takes Christ out of the Word, and gives Him a dwelling-place in the heart. Sitting there enthroned, He brings all the powers and energies of the soul under His sway. Then if we were to single out and give prominence to any graces, rather than others, which indicate that Christ is in a man, we would fix upon these two, *love* and *purity*. To have Him ruling in the heart, is to have love there, for He is love itself; and, as we have had occasion to show already, where He is, sin must be destroyed, purity must reign. Now let us endeavour, with these remarks, to illustrate the subject in hand. Look first at the sinner without Christ. His heart is full of enmity to God, and it is the receptacle of every unholy thought and desire. Every year, as it passes, strengthens the enmity, and deepens the

ungodliness and impurity of that heart. There is a downward process in that man's career ; it becomes darker and darker still ; and you can see the end of it in the chambers of death. But look again at the man whom the Spirit has arrested and brought to Christ, and to whom He has given power to receive Christ, and to exalt Him to the empire of the heart. That converted sinner now loves God, and hates sin. The longer he lives, he loves God the more, and becomes the more pure in affection, in desire, and in conduct. You can trace the progress heavenward as Christ is more and more formed in the man, just as distinctly as you can trace the sinking downwards in the case of the unconverted. But can a man grow in love, do you think,—can his affections expand, embracing more and more what God would have them rest upon, without his receiving from God some tokens of His favour ? Can a man advance in holiness without feeling that thereby he is drawn nearer to God ? No ; love kindled up in the heart, is heaven begun in the heart ; and purity reigning in the heart, is the very foretaste of heaven.

It is not by any formal process of reasoning that this is learnt. A man does not say, I love, and therefore heaven, the place of love, will be my home. He does not say, I am pure, and therefore my place will be among the blessed. But the love and the purity themselves, wrought in him because Christ is in him, are of themselves so heavenly, that they make him feel as if he were in heaven. *Thus* is Christ in the believer the hope of glory. And if we could trace the whole career of a child of God, from the moment when the Spirit first arrests him till the great work of sanctification is consummated in him, we would perceive how, while love and purity spring from his faith, they are, at the same time, the very stays of it ; and how, when the three, faith and love and purity, are perfected, the hope of eternal glory should be exchanged for the full fruition of it, by no violent disruption, such as death sometimes seems to bring along with it, but by the soul's calmly entering into the rest prepared for it. Then, my friends, you will perceive what we conceive to be practically the meaning of the apostle when he says, 'Christ in you, the hope of glory.' It is Christ, the object of your faith,

having purchased for you the title to glory ; and Christ formed in you, fitting you for glory ; and by the very progress of His work in fitting you, enabling you to anticipate and expect the glory.

Now let me just remark, before concluding this head of discourse, that there are not a few who vainly quarrel with themselves, and with God's dealings toward them, in respect of the darkness of their views as to the future. Oh that we had more faith ! they say ; then would we live in a brighter and more hopeful atmosphere ; then would we realize more of heaven. Thus far they are right, that it is faith which looks into heaven, and makes the glory felt and palpable. But they may really need as much love and purity as faith ; for it is these that make the hand steady, while faith looks through the glass which reveals the heavenly blessedness ; and when love abounds, and holiness in heart and life is increasing more and more, then faith can see the celestial country clearly, and hope will prompt increasing toils, through every danger, till the glory is attained.

IV. Now it only remains, in the fourth place, that we make an application of our subject to the converted and unconverted. And here we shall be very brief.

1. To the unconverted present we would say, this is an awful subject for you. Without Christ ye are without hope. There is a glory, but it is not yours ; there is a blessedness, but ye put it away from you. You have dim, unsubstantial, and unwarrantable hopes that you will not perish eternally. But do you not know that you are lost already ? The grave-stone lies upon your hopes while you are without Christ. We might tickle your ears for a moment were we to tell you, as we can tell it upon the authority and testimony of the God who cannot lie, that there is a place for His people, which He calls a *rest* ; a place reserved for His people, where they shall for ever be in the presence of Christ and of all the holy ones ; where they shall see Him ; where they shall be made glad with the joy of His countenance ; where they shall have such blessedness poured into their souls, that eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard, heart hath not conceived, and



cannot conceive, what they shall enjoy. But none of this is for you. You will not have Christ to dwell in you *here*; and He will reject you when you would fain dwell with Him yonder.

2. Again, to the converted. Christ is in you. Are all His graces as fully developed in you as they should be? 'Christ in you, the hope of glory.' My friends, you have much present blessedness; but if you would be yet more blessed, if you would have your heart a sanctuary where peace and love reign, if you would meet the troubles of this life without dismay, if you would contend successfully against temporal and spiritual evils, if you would so realize the future glory as to make the present state but a quiet passage into it, go yet nearer to Christ, trust Him more, love Him more, give Him your undivided homage and service.

'Christ in you, the hope of glory.' Oh, seek to have His image fully formed in you; resist and conquer sin; trample the world under foot; be Christ's in everything; and then, when the end comes, when death looses the silver cord and lets thy soul free, the glory which ye have hoped for will burst full upon your view, and you will feel then, although, perhaps, you cannot altogether say it *now*, that to depart, and to be with Christ, is far better. Amen.

## XXII.

### THE REST PREPARED FOR CHRIST'S FOLLOWERS.

‘There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.’—HEB. IV. 9.

THE form of the apostle's statement here implies that he had been pursuing an argument, and that he gives us the conclusion at which he had arrived. The substance of his argument, and the various steps of it, may be laid out in very few words, without any minute analysis. God had from the beginning instituted a certain season of rest for His creature man, viz. the Sabbath; and had by His own example enforced the observance of it. The Fall did not destroy or alienate this high privilege. The Sabbath still remains, and is designed to be a *rest*, both for the body and for the soul of man. But it only prefigured from the first a more blessed rest, into which man was to be introduced if he kept God's covenant. Then, when the covenant was broken, and the title to that better rest was forfeited, the Lord gave intimation in the economy of grace, that what had been forfeited was not hopelessly removed from the enjoyment of the guilty. His purpose of mercy, together with a sketch or typical representation of the manner in which the mercy was to be exercised, was furnished in His dealings with Abraham and his posterity. To them He promised the land of Canaan, which was intended to typify the inheritance of glory destined for the saints. But you will observe how different the second type of heaven was from the first. The quiet Sabbath rest afforded in Paradise, and the communing with God which it brought along with it, were accompanied with no danger and no difficulty. Man obtained access to his Creator there, and enjoyed Him there without anything to obstruct his intercourse. But when there was sin in the world, the divine

procedure was altered; and the typical rest could only be reached after the bondage of Egypt, and the long and perilous journey through the wilderness. But under the guidance of Moses, and of Joshua after him, the Israelites reached the land of Canaan, and got possession of their inheritance. But then they were in danger of forgetting that the promised land was only a type of the heavenly rest. The apostle therefore deems it necessary to urge upon their attention the truth, that Canaan, with all its privileges, was not *the rest* which the Lord had provided for His own children. And he proves this by referring to a passage in the book of Psalms, where the psalmist exhorts the people to beware of hardening their hearts against Jehovah's counsels, lest they should thereby be excluded from *the rest* which He had promised. As you read, ver. 8, 'If Jesus, *i.e.* Joshua, had given them rest, then would He not afterward have spoken of another day.' The meaning is, that if the possession of the land of Canaan by the seed of Abraham had exhausted the divine promise; if, when they crossed the Jordan under the conduct of Joshua, and settled in that good land, they had got all that the Lord intended to give them under the name of rest; then there would have been no room for allusion a long time afterward to another *rest*, from which unbelievers would be excluded, and into which those only who believed would be permitted to enter. '*There remaineth therefore,*' says the apostle, 'a rest for the people of God.' Under this designation of a rest, he speaks of the future state of blessedness which Christ has secured and is gone to prepare for His faithful followers. And to this subject we have now to direct our attention. We may arrange our remarks under the following heads: *first*, the nature of the rest which is here promised; *secondly*, the parties for whom it is reserved; and *thirdly*, some of the exercises through which they have to pass in seeking after it.

I. In the first place, let us consider for a little the nature of the rest which is here promised. On this topic it is not necessary for us to say much, as it is impossible through the medium of language to convey any right conception of the heavenly glory. Let it be noticed particularly, that the term

which the apostle here uses to denote '*rest*' is peculiar, and is manifestly employed by him because he was writing to the *Hebrew* Christians. The text, if literally rendered, would run thus: 'There remaineth therefore the keeping of a Sabbath for the people of God.' He speaks thus to the Hebrews, because they could understand what he meant when he represented the Sabbath with all its spiritual privileges and enjoyments as a kind of shadow of the eternal inheritance of the saints. But it is quite a different word which he uses when addressing the Thessalonians, most of whom had been converted from heathenism. 'It is a righteous thing with God,' he says, 'to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you; and to you who are troubled *rest* with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels.' Here the word which denotes *rest* is that which is commonly employed to express exemption from all the toils, fatigues, troubles, cares, and evils of life; and if we can imagine a *perfect* exemption from all these, we have a kind of image, in one respect, of the eternal inheritance which is to be enjoyed by the saints. Now, perhaps by combining together these two ideas conveyed by '*the rest*,'—the *negative* view of it as a perfect exemption from all the toils, fatigues, troubles, and evils of life; and the positive view of it as the keeping of a Sabbath, *i.e.* the enjoyment of communion with God, and the rendering of active service to Him in the observance of His holy ordinances,—we shall best enter into the meaning of the apostle's words: 'There remaineth a rest for the people of God.' We are not to suppose, however, that we thus obtain anything like a conception of all that is implied in the heavenly blessedness, or of all that is revealed in the Scripture concerning it, for this is not the case. But surveying it under the one aspect in which it is presented to us in the text, simply as *a rest*, the two particulars which have been stated will serve to communicate to us some faint idea of the nature of it.

1. First then, *negatively*, the heavenly state brings a complete exemption from all the toils and sorrows and evils of the present life, and that in a *literal* as well as in a *spiritual* sense. Man in Paradise was designed for moderate labour during

six days of the week, that in the hallowed rest of the Sabbath, with all its purely spiritual enjoyments, he might, as we have already said, have a lively emblem of the blessedness to which he was to be exalted if he kept God's covenant. But when he transgressed, it formed part of the curse pronounced upon him, 'that in the sweat of his face he should eat bread,' toiling in the midst of cares and sorrows for his bodily sustenance. It is written, however, respecting heaven, that there shall be no curse there; and so all that makes labour painful, and all the troubles and anxieties amid which it has so often to be prosecuted here, will there be altogether and for ever unknown. How welcome is the returning Sabbath to the man who has had to undergo six days' hard drudgery, whether bodily or mental; when as it dawns upon him he can say, 'This day I am free; this day the world has no claim upon my strength and services; this day I can devote to higher concerns than those which are of the earth earthy!' Then the rest which God hath provided for His people is an eternal Sabbath; and to the care-worn and toil-worn believer, how delightful should be the prospect of it! But this is the lowest view which the Scripture gives us of the subject; and were we to stop to speak particularly of the contrast between earth and heaven in *all* those respects in which the Fall has entailed temporal miseries upon man,—were we to dwell upon such topics as these, that all the painful diseases to which our mortal frame is subject, and all the disquietudes and sorrows and anguish which prey upon the soul, and all the sad bereavements which rend the heart, will be banished from the paradise above; 'for God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away,'—still we would only be looking at the promised rest from the lowest point at which a glimpse of it can be obtained. Let us go up higher, therefore, and contemplate it as furnishing complete exemption from all the spiritual troubles and evils to which we are here exposed. And in so doing, let us select the case of any individual believer, as he pursues the path of life. The evil which presses most heavily upon him is that corruption of nature which still adheres to him,

and which it is his great work to subdue and mortify. It is chiefly through it that the temptations of the world and of the wicked one exert their power to beat him down, as he advances onward. And apart from these, it is itself his greatest hindrance, leading him to do the things he would not, and preventing him from doing the things he would. It is an evil ever present, sometimes apparently slumbering, but ever ready to break out into ruinous vitality. It is a volcano in the breast, which always presents weaker or stronger indications that the fire is burning, but which sometimes bursts forth with tremendous power, sweeping before it in a moment a thousand good purposes, darkening the whole soul, and obscuring for the time all thought of God and of eternity. Is the path of every believer marked more or less by mourning, by tears, by bitter anguish of spirit? this corruption, which is the source of all his shortcomings, is the cause of it. Does he at one point drag himself heavily onward, feeling those duties and exercises to be burdensome, which in his more healthy state he counts delightful and refreshing? it is heart corruption that puts on the drag, because he has not been on the watch against it. Is he betrayed into actual sin at another point, and thus stript of his peace, and rendered the victim of remorse? it is corruption that has taken the reins, because he has not sought for grace to keep it in. Is he ready at another point to sink down into despair, as if he never could reach heaven's blessedness? it is just the survey of the dismal scene of corruption *within*, and its hideous fruits *without*, that thus lays him prostrate, and because for the time he has lost sight of the efficacy of the blood of Jesus, and of the grace of the omnipotent Spirit. And then, on the other hand, are there seasons when the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, is shed abroad in his heart,—when the love of God glows fervently in his breast,—when heavenly hope soars high, and the things which are not seen and eternal are vividly experienced to be realities? At such seasons it will be found that the power of corruption has been successfully resisted and overthrown, and that the soul's freedom from its grievous yoke is that which gives room for the enlarged exercise of peace and love and hope,—*that* which

puts far off the earthly things, and brings heaven so near. Then, believers in Jesus, the time is coming when an eternal season of far brighter sunshine than these give will be introduced; when that corruption which mars your peace, and makes your love wax cold, and obscures your hope, will be completely and for ever destroyed. At present you groan, being burdened; but in the rest that remaineth for you, the burden will be removed, and there will be the song of triumph instead of the groaning of the prisoner. At present you have to fight against manifold temptations which your sinful heart arms with power to lead you captive; but *in the rest* temptation and sin will both be done away. On earth you have to contend against the evil thought, the forbidden desire, the unruly appetite, all bred and nurtured by the heart's corruption,—and oh, how fierce and painful that contest sometimes is!—but in the future world you will be disturbed by no such conflict, for all these things which are of the flesh will be put off with the garment of mortality which is dropped into the grave. *Here* you have to suffer many a sad and bitter pang on account of the deceitfulness and waywardness of your hearts; but *yonder* there will be no such suffering—the *new* heart and the right spirit will there be perfect. Then indeed will the words have their full accomplishment: 'There will be nothing to hurt or to defile in all God's holy mountain.' Well, then, may heaven be called a rest, since it is the place of perfect deliverance from sin, the root of all other spiritual miseries.

2. But now, in the second place, we have to speak for a little of the heavenly rest as a state of *positive* enjoyment. It is an eternal Sabbath-keeping. I have, indeed, already briefly referred to it in this respect, as being the reality of what the Sabbath typifies, when it is considered as affording a season of repose from the ordinary fatigues and toils of life. But to a spiritually-minded man this conveys a most inadequate and unworthy idea of sabbatical privileges. He rejoices in the Sabbath, because it brings to him the opportunity of holding closer and more unbroken communion with God than he can enjoy on other days, and because he can then engage in those acts of worship, and in all those sacred services, by which he feels himself brought nearer to God, and God brought nearer

to him. The Sabbath, as a rest from bodily toil, is as much the property of the beast of burden as of man himself, for it is so spoken of in the fourth commandment. But as bringing with it the privilege of communion with God in the secret and public exercises of religion, it is peculiarly a day of enjoyment to those in whom there has been wrought by the Spirit a relish for divine things. Yet how imperfect is this enjoyment, even at the best ! How many vain thoughts will interrupt a man when he would have his attention closely fixed upon the Word of God ! How difficult it is to keep the soul in a right frame, even while we are engaged in prayer ; and how insidiously will the world, with its concerns and cares, steal in upon us when we would seek to realize God's presence, and desire to be alone with Him ! Still, in the measure in which a believer is able, on the Lord's day, to rise above the world, to feel himself in the Lord's presence, and to fasten his heart upon Him as his own God and portion in Jesus Christ, the Sabbath is to him a delight ; it is far better than other days ; it is the type of heaven. Then what must heaven itself be to the soul perfected in knowledge and righteousness and holiness ; when there shall be no more seeing as through a glass darkly, but face to face ; and when the redeemed shall know even as also they are known ? If the light of God's countenance lifted on His people makes them more glad than the men of the world can be when their corn and wine do most abound to them, what rapture will they feel when they are in His immediate presence, rejoicing in the endless tokens of His love ! To be for ever where Christ is ; to see His face ; to live in His smile ; to know, without any doubt or fear, that they are in *His* heart ; and to be able to give Him *their* whole heart, without even one stray affection ;—this will be the perfection of enjoyment to the children of God, this will be the soul's everlasting rest. And if we read in the Scripture that in heaven 'the servants of Christ shall serve Him,' let it not be supposed that such service will be any interruption of the rest. The human soul cannot be inactive ; it is not so even during the hours of sleep. In the world to come it will know more and more ; it will love more and more ; it will adore with increasingly



intense desire. It will not rest in anything, but in the object of its supreme affection—the God of redemption; and to serve Him in any way He may appoint will but add to its enjoyment, and, if we may so speak, make the heavenly rest yet more blessed. We might easily expatiate on this pleasing theme, but we must forbear, as other important topics claim our attention. Let only this one other remark be added, that however pleasing it may be to turn our thoughts toward heaven, and glorious as the prospect of it is, even when we think of it exclusively as a rest from earthly troubles, and especially from sin, where the soul shall have full freedom to delight itself in God, yet mere wishes and desires will not carry us up to that peaceful sanctuary. Many wish to be there for whom its gates will never open. Some may *hope* to be there whose portion will be in the outer darkness. And not a few may be found earnestly striving to reach the rest who will never enter into it, because they will not submit to take the path which God has marked out in His Word as leading to it, because they will not look to Christ as alone ‘the way, the truth, and the life.’ These points, however, will have to be alluded to afterwards. This is what I would at present impress upon you, that those who have no relish for spiritual things now; to whom the Sabbath, as a season for communing with God, and for His worship, has no attraction, but is rather a weariness; and those who, instead of contending against sin, are its very slaves, dream in vain of being raised to heaven. Their tastes and their pursuits but too plainly indicate that they are treading another path, even that which, if they are not arrested and turned from it by the grace of God, will terminate in the dark chambers of eternal death.

II. But we come now to consider our second topic, viz. who the parties are for whom the rest spoken of in the text remaineth, viz. the people of God. ‘*The people of God.*’ This is an expression which, however familiar it may be to *us*, is vastly important and comprehensive. It *might* be summed up in one word, ‘the redeemed;’ or it may be resolved into various particulars, each of which gives it additional significance. At present I shall adopt the method of analyzing it,

and alluding to some of the particulars which it embraces, that our remarks may be the more pointed and practical.

1. First of all, then, 'the people of God' are those who are the objects of His electing love. It was said to Israel, 'The Lord thy God hath chosen thee to be a special people to Himself, above all people that are upon the face of the earth.' Now what Israel was made, in contrast with all other nations, as the object of God's choice, and as thereby put in possession of privileges which no other nation enjoyed, is designed to show us that there is, in like manner, a contrast, although unspeakably more important, between those of the human race who are chosen of God unto salvation, and all others besides them. All men are God's *creatures*, but those only who are chosen of Him in Christ are *His people*; and to them only it will be said at the great day, 'Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.' It may be alleged, indeed, that in specifying this particular, so far from urging practical truth, we are dealing in dark and speculative doctrine. But I think not. My object is to have you connect together these two things: that the same sovereign grace which has provided an everlasting rest for creatures who are by nature children of wrath, has also selected those who are to enjoy that rest; that none should boast in Jehovah's presence; but that the whole scheme of salvation, in the planning and executing and applying of it, should be to the praise of the glory of His grace. And this surely is practical doctrine. For if you take away sovereign grace, or what here amounts to the same thing, electing love, you remove the very ground on which any descendant of Adam can look for the enjoyment of life eternal.

2. But passing from this, I notice secondly, that the people of God are those who have *been called by* Him into the fellowship of Jesus Christ, His Son. The gospel is frequently compared to light. Christ is called the Sun of righteousness; and the truths which He has revealed for the salvation of sinners are fitly likened to rays emanating from that glorious Sun, and illuminating this dark and miserable world. Then, just as the natural light shines equally upon all, but has only power to burn when it is concentrated by a lens on some one special

point, so the gospel truth, which is proclaimed to all without distinction, has only power to save when it is directed specially by the Spirit to this or that particular sinner, making his heart burn within him. But when the Spirit makes the application of the truth, causing that sinner to feel his wretchedness and guilt, and revealing to him the Saviour's love, and His power and willingness to save; and when, by His grace, He bends and breaks down the rebellious will, so that the sinner, now converted into a believer, welcomes Christ, and yields himself to Him as His willing servant; this is what is meant by 'being called by God into the fellowship of Jesus Christ His Son.' All who are the objects of electing love are so called. The term *fellowship* implies the closest union; Christ giving Himself to the believer, and the believer giving himself to Christ; Christ taking from the believer everything that pollutes and degrades him, and the believer taking from Christ, from the exhaustless fulness that is in Him, everything that is needful to purify and dignify and make him blessed.

And now, though we would not have ventured to come to you directly with the question, Are ye among the objects of God's electing love? because that question can only be answered by a reference to the felt experience of the Spirit's work upon the heart, and the change that has been produced upon the affections and the whole life and character, we can with less hesitation propose the question, Have ye been called into the fellowship of Jesus Christ? 'Whom He did predestinate, them He also called.' Have you then been called? You may be unable to give an answer directly in the affirmative. But let us put the inquiry in this form: Is Christ precious to you? Have you sincerely surrendered yourselves to Him? Are you contented with *Him* as your portion, though you should be stript of all earthly good? If you can say, Yes; if you can say with Peter, 'Lord, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee;' or if you can only reach the point of saying with your whole heart, 'Lord, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I desire to love Thee;' then we would cherish good hope that you have been called into this holy fellowship. And vast are the blessings it brings with it. Indeed, all the blessings of redemption

are wrapped up in it. To be in fellowship or partnership with Christ, is to share with Him in all that, as Mediator, He has to bestow ; it is to have a right not only to be called the *people of God*, but even the *children of God* ; 'and if children, then heirs ; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ.'

3. In the third place, 'the people of God' are those who have His Spirit dwelling in them. This is the great seal of their relationship to Him : 'Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts.' It is also the present earnest they have of the future glory ; for we read, 'In whom, after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance.' It is not *figuratively* but *truly* that the Spirit of God dwells in every believer, thus making him of one spirit with the Lord Christ, and marking him out as God's special property. And in consequence of this indwelling it is that the believer is made a partaker of that peace and love and hope and joy which are of the things of Christ, the Head, taken by the Spirit and communicated by Him to the members of Christ. And when these graces are in lively exercise, which they can only be when we are careful not to grieve the Spirit, then is the soul lifted up toward heaven, and the certainty of the inheritance is for the time realized.

Further, it is in consequence of this indwelling of the Spirit that believers, in one respect at least, are regarded as so precious in the sight of God. They are dear to Him, as the purchase of the blood of Christ. But the Spirit in them constitutes them the temples of God ; and so they are the objects of His watchful care. Their very dust is dear to Him. It is consecrated by His Spirit dwelling in them ; and when the great day comes, it will be collected, and purified, and framed anew, a glorious temple, fitted to be the habitation of the perfected soul in the heavenly rest.

Now here we are certainly warranted to ask the question, because the Scripture asks it, Have ye received the Holy Ghost ? If we are God's people, members of His family, we must be partakers of His Spirit. There will, however, of necessity be the same hesitation felt in answering this question directly, as in giving a direct reply to the previous question,

'Have you been called into the fellowship of Jesus Christ?' We say then, Is it your ardent desire and prayer, that God would send forth the Spirit of His Son into your heart? Do you feel that without the Spirit's help ye can do nothing, and do you earnestly seek His grace and guidance? Then these are hopeful symptoms, for it is only the Spirit Himself that can excite such longings in the heart. Man alienated from God will never seek the Spirit of God, until the Spirit draws him. And alas! many who sit under the preaching of the gospel shrink from the thought of the Spirit's indwelling, as bringing them too closely in contact with the Holy One, because they prefer cherishing and indulging in their favourite sins. It is an awful infatuation. It is a preference of death to life.

Joshua and Caleb only, of all the grown men that came up out of Egypt, were permitted to enter into Canaan, because they were of another spirit from those among whom they lived. And so none will be permitted to enter into the everlasting rest, except those who are separate from the world, by having in them the Spirit of Christ.

4. In the fourth place, 'the people of God' are those who are the objects of His sanctifying grace—they are a holy people. The apostle says, 'God hath predestinated us to be conformed to the image of His Son.' The development of this image in believers is their sanctification. The sentences of Scripture are emphatic: 'That into heaven there shall enter nothing that defileth;' and, 'That without holiness no man shall see the Lord;' and, on the other hand, it is as distinctly said, in contrast with this, 'We shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.' But how imperfectly is the likeness of Christ brought out, even in the most advanced on earth! How many spots are there marring its beauty and consistency where some of its lineaments seem to be impressed! And what cause for self-abasement and deep humiliation in the sight of God must His own people feel every day, when they think of the wandering of their hearts from Him, and of their other sins and shortcomings! Ah, my friends, if they were not upheld by an Almighty arm, if they had not Christ to look to and to lean upon, if they had not the promise of the

Spirit's grace to help them, they would sink into the mire of pollution, and be lost. But blessed be God, He has said, 'My grace is sufficient for you; my strength is made perfect in weakness.' And so, infirm, irresolute, often halting, sometimes falling, believers are yet carried onward; the valley of Baca is for them filled with refreshing springs; they go from strength to strength; every one of them at last appeareth before God in Zion.

'There remaineth therefore a rest for the people of God;' for those who are the objects of His electing love, who have been called into the fellowship of Jesus Christ His Son, who have His Spirit dwelling in them, and who, by the Spirit's grace, are more and more conformed to His likeness. What do we say then to these things, brethren? Must we not feel, when we look into the mirror of the law, and behold our own likeness in contrast with the law's purity, that our hope of reaching heaven would be for ever annihilated, were it not for the free and unbounded grace of God? Are we among the holy? Nay; must we not lay our hand upon our mouth and cry out, Unclean? Well, it is good for us to be sensible of our uncleanness, to bewail it, and to acknowledge it. And if rightly affected by a sense of it, we look to Jesus, saying in faith, as did the poor leper, 'Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean,' He will not cast us off. His blood will be applied to cleanse away our guilt, and to purge our consciences, and His Spirit will be given to remove the defilement of our hearts; and thus, like the redeemed who have gone before, we also, from bearing the image of the earthly, will bear the image of the heavenly Adam, and be made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light. But if the burden of sin sits lightly upon us; if the consciousness of guilt, while it sometimes makes us tremble, never truly humbles us; if we continue to live on contentedly in our pollution; then, be our hopes of future happiness what they may, into God's rest we cannot enter; Christ's face in glory we cannot see.

III. In the remarks which have been already made, we have in great measure anticipated what would now come to be considered under the remaining head of discourse, viz. some of the exercises through which the people of God have to pass, in

seeking after the promised rest. But after all it may not be unprofitable very briefly to advert to one or two of them, even though we should substantially repeat what has been already stated.

The apostle says, ver. 11, '*Let us labour* therefore to enter into that rest,' implying that there are hardships and dangers to be encountered, which call for the most resolute energy and untiring activity on our part, to meet and surmount them. A man may sit and muse often upon the heavenly glory, and say to himself, Would that it were mine; but this will not make it his, nor even carry him one step toward it. Something more than musing is needed—arduous and persevering exertion.

1. In the first place, there must be continued *watchfulness*, not only against dangers without, but against the rising of corruption within. We must not only remember that there is a subtle enemy ever ready to take advantage of us, and a world that sometimes smiles to allure us, and sometimes frowns to drive us into sin, against both which adversaries we are never safe for a moment, without being on the watch; but that there are also tendencies to evil in our own hearts, which we can only meet by being jealous over ourselves with a godly jealousy. For lack of watchfulness, many who promised well at the first, and seemed fairly to have embarked for the heavenly rest, have been driven from their course, and have made shipwreck of their souls in the end.

2. In the second place, there must be constant communication maintained with God. A prayerless day will be a day, if not of open sin, at least of declension. 'Watch and pray,' said our Lord, 'that ye enter not into temptation.'

3. In the third place, there must be the habitual exercise of *self-denial*. To this the apostle alludes when he says, 'Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin that doth most easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us.' When we speak of self-denial, we do not mean such mortification of the flesh as is enjoined by the Church of Rome, as is practised by the anchorite or the devotee for the purpose of establishing a claim, on the ground of merit, to the favour of God; but such a subjugation of our own feelings and desires and appetites to the divine will, as that in all

things it shall have the authority ; yea, such a sacrifice of our own wishes and inclinations, even with respect to things lawful, when it is requisite for the advancement of Christ's cause, as shall show that we count ourselves not our own, but His. This is indeed one of the hardest exercises to which we can be called ; and divine grace alone can enable a man to practise it. But it is the proper exercise of the believer ; and the grace will not be withheld if he seek it earnestly.

4. In the fourth place, there must be a stedfast looking to Christ. So speaks the apostle : ' Looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.' Jesus is the great breaker up of the believer's path, and his eye must ever rest upon Him. When the sense of sin unnerves and overpowers him, it is only by looking to Jesus that he can again obtain peace and comfort and strength. When he is faint and weary because of the way, it is only by looking to Jesus that he will be reconciled to the hardships he has to suffer, because Jesus trode the same way before him. When he would give all up for lost, it is only by looking to Jesus that his hope and courage are restored, for then he feels that it is Jesus who has purchased and who bestows the inheritance, and that He has power to raise to it even a creature so unworthy and so helpless as he is. Yes, ' looking to Jesus ' is the believer's proper attitude ; and the more fixedly he looks, the more steadily will he advance toward the heavenly rest.

5. Finally, there must be complete dependence on the Holy Spirit's grace. Oh, we must be convinced most deeply that we are of ourselves altogether powerless, as well to think as to do what is pleasing to God ; and we must, at the same time, magnify the Spirit, as able to convert our weakness into strength, if we would climb successfully the steep ascent that leads to glory. Let us feel ourselves to be nothing, and omnipotent grace to be everything. Let us labour, praying for the Spirit's help ; let us pray for the Spirit's help, labouring and still looking to Jesus ; and in the end we shall reach the rest.

Such are some of the exercises in which God's people have to be engaged while they journey toward the heavenly Canaan. They become more pleasant and easy the longer they are prac-



tised. But even were some of them to become harder and more difficult, were the watchfulness and self-denial to be accompanied with increasing toil and pain, yet the further we advance, they might still be regarded as worth enduring, seeing they are connected with such a glorious issue—the attainment of an everlasting deliverance from sorrow and from sin, in the presence and enjoyment of God and of the Lamb. Oh that we were all gathered safely round the precious Saviour in that blessed place, where the eternal Sabbath is kept, where they go no more out, but serve Him for ever in the upper sanctuary, where eternal peace and love and glory reign. Amen.

## XXIII.

### THE PRIVILEGES OF BEING QUICKENED, RAISED UP, AND SEATED IN HEAVENLY PLACES.

‘But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ (by grace ye are saved); and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Jesus Christ.’—EPH. II. 4-7.

FROM this passage, as from a fountain overflowing with truths the most precious and elevating, we may, by the help of the Spirit, draw some subjects of meditation suitable to the exercises in which we are this day to be engaged. Let us first take a brief general survey of the text, and then mark out more particularly the topics which it is our purpose to illustrate and enforce. The words which have been read are descriptive of the condition to which believers in Christ are raised by sovereign grace, as contrasted with that in which the gospel finds them. It is very humbling to the pride of the natural man, that such an account should be given of his state and character and prospects, as that which the apostle sets before us in the opening verses of the chapter; but as it rests upon the testimony of the Spirit, who cannot err, we must submit to receive it without qualification or captious questioning. *The state* of man unconverted and without Christ is declared to be a state of *death in trespasses and sins*; his *character* is summed up in the words, that ‘he walks according to the course of this world; according to the prince of the power of the air;’ and that his conversation, *i.e.* his whole mode of life, is in the lusts of the flesh, and consists in a fulfilling of the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and his *prospects* are briefly but significantly shadowed forth in

these few dark words, 'He is by nature a child of wrath.' Then comes the contrast. Instead of the expression, 'Dead in trespasses and sins,' we read, 'He hath quickened us together with Christ;' instead of the character drawn in the words, 'Walking according to the course of this world, under the power of the apostate Spirit; and fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind,' we read, 'He hath raised us up together with Christ;' and instead of the destiny, 'children of wrath,' there is a scene of triumph and of blessedness presented to us: 'He hath made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.' Such is the contrast. And then, this is peculiarly to be noticed, as pervading the whole passage, that every part of the believer's changed and glorious condition and prospects is referred immediately to the grace of God, as the origin of it. There is not a more decided blow given to the pride of the carnal heart, in the faithful description of its native loathsomeness and impurity, than there is to all vain-glorying on the part of the renewed, when the apostle says, 'God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us.' And lest even that declaration should not be sufficiently plain, he further throws in, parenthetically, the sentence, 'By grace ye are saved;' and repeats the same thing afterwards more fully in vers. 8-10. 'For by grace ye are saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.' There is no theme, indeed, more congenial to the heart of the apostle, as is manifest from all his writings, than that of magnifying the grace of God in the salvation of sinners. And his most common method of doing so, is by the use of the expression, 'The *riches* of the grace of God;' as in the text, 'God, who is *rich* in mercy.' He speaks as if he would have us look up to Jehovah, not with suspicion and dread, which are the feelings awakened in the breast by the consciousness of guilt, but as if we should regard Him as waiting and ready to shower down, out of the exhaustless fulness of infinite love, every blessing that can be desired by

the poor needy soul that seeks Him, and places in Him its confidence.

So much for the general bearing of the text in its connection with the preceding context; and now we may notice the principal doctrines which are laid down in these verses. The first of these is, that the whole scheme of redemption is to be traced up to the free and sovereign love of God; as is manifest from the words, 'God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, hath quickened us.' The price which Christ paid for the redemption of the lost did not purchase the Father's love. On the contrary, that love was the well-spring from which flowed the purpose of redemption, the everlasting covenant with all its blessings, the appointment of the Son to be the Substitute of sinners, and the Mediator between God and men; and the whole of the provisions of that wonderful dispensation, by which those who were naturally far from God, are again brought nigh to Him. Then the next doctrine in the passage is one which needs to be as frequently enforced as that of the love of God, and which forms, indeed, the principal illustration of it, viz. the natural guilt and wretchedness of the creatures who are the objects of the divine love. '*Even when we were dead* in sins, He hath quickened us.' And to the same effect it is said in another place, 'God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet *sinners*, Christ died for us.' *That* very corruption which it might have been supposed would have rendered man utterly repulsive in the sight of the Holy One of Israel, as it exposed him to the righteous condemnation of His law, made him an object of the divine compassion. *Love*, which is the outgoing of God's favour toward sinless beings, was softened into *mercy*, which is the outgoing of compassion toward the ill-deserving and the miserable, in the case of mankind sinners; and it is only when we take home to us, in its fullest extent, the charge which the Scripture brings against us, of being in our natural estate guilty and totally corrupt, that we acquire any right conception of the unfathomable love and mercy which light up the whole plan of salvation by Jesus Christ. Then the third doctrine in the passage is, that the deliverance of sinners from the state of spiritual

death, and the raising of them to spiritual enjoyment and blessedness, is altogether a divine work. ‘*God* hath quickened us together with Christ; and hath raised us up with Him, and made us sit together with Him in heavenly places.’ Vain are all the hopes of man founded upon the liberty of his own will, and upon His own merits, either in purposing well or in acting rightly, to obtain acceptance with God. If the expression *dead in sin* is to be interpreted according to ordinary rules, it certainly signifies, that those to whom it is applied are utterly powerless for doing what is pleasing to God; and if the opposite expression, ‘God hath quickened us,’ has any proper meaning, it as certainly signifies, that it is only by the exertion of divine power that the soul is rendered capable of all those exercises which are proper to a state of spiritual life, such as faith, love, and active effort to obey and to glorify God. And it is by the same power that these exercises are continued, and gradually matured on earth, until they are finally perfected, when the heavenly glory bursts upon the view of the redeemed, and they see no longer as through a glass darkly, but face to face, and know even as they are known. Then the fourth doctrine in the passage is, that for their experience of all saving blessings, and their advancement to the endless enjoyment of God, believers are indebted to their union to Christ, the Head of the spiritual family. This is plain from the following forms of expression: ‘He hath quickened us together *with Christ* ;’ ‘He hath raised us up together, that is, with Christ ;’ ‘He hath made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ.’ And then the last doctrine is, that all the forementioned operations of divine love, and communications of divine mercy and grace, are for the illustration of the glory of Jehovah: ‘That in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us through Jesus Christ.’ This truth must never be lost sight of. It is the truth which renders intelligible the whole scheme of redemption, and without which it is not intelligible. We, the children of the dust, are always disposed to magnify our own importance. But what constitutes our importance in the sight of God? why, it is nothing else than our very wretchedness. It is *that* which commends His love, in the

framing of the covenant of grace, and giving up His Son to die for sinners. But the great *end* of the whole is, that He may be glorified; and our hearts are not in right frame, if for a moment we would put anything else than the glory of God as the mainspring of all the movements by which the affairs of the universe are regulated.

But now, while we have thus stated the several doctrines which are embodied in the whole passage before us, and the importance of which it would not be easy to overrate, it is more especially to the following words that I would direct your attention at present, vers. 5, 6, 'He hath quickened us together with Christ; and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.' But it may not be unsuitable that we offer a few remarks, first of all, as to the meaning which we attach to these very significant expressions. The general interpretation of them by commentators is to this effect, that all the privileges here specified, the quickening, the raising up, and the making us to sit in heavenly places in Christ Jesus, are to be understood with reference not to what falls within the present enjoyment of believers, but to what is secured for them hereafter, by the death, and resurrection, and intercession of Christ. In consequence of the union of believers to Christ by faith, and their communion with Him as their living Head, their resurrection, and advancement to the heavenly blessedness, and eternal glorification, is made as secure as if the whole had been already accomplished; and therefore it is spoken of here as having taken place, because it is so certainly to be effected. Such is the view usually taken of the passage. And in one respect we have nothing to advance in opposition to it. It is a cheering truth, that the souls of Christ's people, quickened by His Spirit, and their bodies constituted the temples of God through the Spirit's indwelling, are so identified with Christ, so united to Him, that whatever wreck may be made upon them by death and the grave, they shall most unquestionably be safe, as His purchased and valued property. But with this admission, we cannot divest ourselves of the idea, which the whole context of the passage justifies, that the quickening, and the raising up, and the sitting in heavenly places, are *present*

privileges enjoyed by believers in virtue of their union to Christ; and that whatever amount of glory they may indicate as awaiting the redeemed, when they shall have reached their Father's house, they refer to a present blessedness and glory which belong to them during their pilgrimage toward it. And perhaps there would have been no hesitation felt by any in admitting the propriety of an application of these remarkable words to the *present* condition of believers, had it not been for the concluding expression: 'He hath made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.' It is therefore especially necessary that we endeavour, before proceeding further, to ascertain what this expression precisely means. It occurs oftener than once in this Epistle to the Ephesians. Thus, i. 3, 'Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.' Then again, i. 20, 'According to the working of His mighty power, which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places.' Then in the text, 'He hath made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ.' And once more, in iii. 10, 'To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God.' Now you will observe that in all these passages the word 'places' is printed in the italic character, to show that it is not found in the original Scriptures, but is merely inserted according to the judgment of the translators. It is solely, therefore, from the context that the particular shade of meaning of the word 'heavenly' must be gathered. For example, in i. 3, we would say the meaning plainly is, 'Blessed be God, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly *things*, i.e. in things pertaining to heaven.' But when it is said, 'He hath set Christ at His own right hand in the heavenly,' it is evidently *places* that must be supplied, because it is to *heaven* in the strict and proper sense of the term that the reference is made; as also, when it is further said, 'That to the principalities and powers in heavenly *places* might be known the manifold wisdom of God.' But in the text, although when believers are represented as *sitting* together with Christ, the form of expression,

'in heavenly *places*,' seems to be altogether appropriate, yet the real meaning may be, not exclusively in the heavenly *state*, but in places, in conditions, in circumstances, pertaining to the heavenly state, although in the meantime only preparatory to it. It is this view that we adopt of the meaning of the passage; and in accordance with it, our object in the present discourse shall be, to speak of the three privileges which are here declared to belong to believers, viz. their being quickened, and raised up, and made to sit in places, or in circumstances, pertaining to the heavenly state, as belonging to them even while they are in this world of sin and vicissitude; then, in the second place, to advert to the full enjoyment of these privileges, which awaits them when that which is only in part shall be done away; and, in the third place, to show how these privileges, both in their imperfect measure on earth, and in all their fulness in heaven, flow from the believer's union to Christ. But while we make this general division of our subject, the point to which we would give chiefest prominence is that which respects the sitting in heavenly places with Christ.

I. In the first place, then, let us speak for a little of the three privileges which are here declared to belong to believers, their being quickened, and raised up, and made to sit in *places*, or in circumstances, pertaining to the heavenly state, even while they are in this world of sin and vicissitude.

1. In the first place, then, let us speak of the *quickenings*. There can be no doubt that this privilege, in some intelligible sense at least, is enjoyed by God's people on earth; or, in other words, that there is a change wrought upon them which is equivalent to their being made alive from having been previously dead. Often does the psalmist pray that the Lord would quicken him; and in some places he speaks of having actually experienced the vital change: 'Thy word hath quickened me;' 'I will never forget Thy precepts, for with them Thou hast quickened me.' But this, it may be said, only relates to the effect which the Word of God produces in the way of exciting a man to greater activity in serving God, when he has been led by the reading of the Word to think



seriously of previous sins and shortcomings. And if this be the understanding which any have of the import of the psalmist's words, then the *quickenings* of which we speak at present is something very different. It is a real transition from death to life, with reference to the condition of *the soul*, that we regard as expressed in the text by the words, 'He hath quickened us together with Christ.' We could not convey a clearer impression of what we conceive to be the difference between the soul as dead and the soul as quickened, than by saying that it corresponds to the difference between the body as dead and the same body when the warm tide of life animates and moves it. After the last breath has been drawn, the members of the body are still all in their place, *as fit* for their functions as they were a moment before, but now powerless, because that living principle which imparted to them their susceptibility and fitness for action, and their energy, has fled. And this illustrates precisely the contrast between the soul dead and the soul made alive or quickened. There was no part of the *spiritual* frame, no faculty of the soul destroyed when the first man transgressed, and, in consequence, spiritually died. For instance, he did not cease to love; but, alas, the love of the creature was substituted for the love of God: *desire* was not obliterated from his heart, but it was the desire of evil, not of good, that was left; neither his memory, nor his power of imagining, nor his reasoning faculty was wiped away; but all of them were disordered from what had been their delightful exercises before; *his will* was not stript of its natural liberty to choose or to refuse, either in the region of thought or of action, but it had acquired the bias toward that which is evil; and his *moral sense*, his faculty of judging of things as right or wrong, and passing sentence accordingly, was not annihilated,—it only condemned himself, and made him seek if possible to hide himself from God. In a word, in the soul spiritually dead, that is, alienated from God, we find, as in the dead body, everything that constitutes the individual being, except *life*.

You will, of course, understand that in speaking thus of spiritual death, we have not adverted to all the miseries produced by man's apostasy from God; but merely to some of the more obvious and marked changes that have thus been

stamped upon his soul. And we have done this, that we might have opportunity to speak of the quickening which is alluded to in the text, as a *present privilege*, and to trace out the reality of the spiritual life which is communicated.

As to the quickening itself, then, let it be observed, it is nothing else than that work of regeneration to which our Lord refers, when He says, 'Verily I say unto you, Except a man be born again of the Spirit, he cannot see the kingdom of God.' It is the same operation to which so many allusions are made throughout the Scripture, as to the following effect: 'The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death;' 'Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth in Him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.' We need not make further quotation, as all these passages refer to a life *now* imparted to the soul, and making its condition as different from its condition previously as these words indicate, 'Being made alive from the dead.' And while the text says, 'He hath quickened us together with Christ,' you read elsewhere more particularly, 'It is *the Spirit* that quickeneth;' and, 'He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him.'

So much for the *mere fact* of the quickening, and of the agency by which it is wrought. Now let us look for a few moments at the indications by which the *reality* of the spiritual life is demonstrated. These we shall find to consist in movements of heart and soul, exactly opposed to the particulars which we have noted as the marks of spiritual death. Believers in Christ love God, because He first loved them; they see, they feel, the claims which He has to their affection; they are ashamed because they love Him so little. What a transformation this from the condition of the unregenerate, who love and serve the creature more than the Creator. Then, again, *desire* in them has its new objects also: self-gratification is no longer their distinguishing characteristic; they would have Christ magnified both in their life and in their death. Then memory is full-charged with amazing proofs of the Lord's goodness; the power of imagining finds its food among the riches of God's promises, and the faculty of reason decides

that Jehovah alone is the satisfying good and real portion of the soul. The will, unchained, is able to make choice of what God wills as man's proper pursuit; and the conscience, resealed upon its throne, passes its verdict in favour of what God's law approves as holy and just and good. These changes produced by the Spirit demonstrate the reality of the life which He has given. But perhaps we have spoken too abstractly and obscurely upon these points. We would say therefore, in language which may be to some more intelligible, that the three great movements of the quickened soul in which it has its proper exercise, and its real enjoyment, are *faith*, which, resting upon Christ, through whom all blessings come to it, imparts the feeling of stability and security to the believer; *hope*, which, looking to the good things contained in the promises, helps him to struggle on against all temporal evils; and *love*, which may be called the very bringing of God Himself into the soul, for God is love.

Now, these three graces, faith and hope and love,—all of them the fruits of the Holy Spirit,—are the present evidences that believers are *here* in this world quickened together with Christ. These graces are the evidences that life now reigns where death reigned before. *Faith* is an evidence of life; it is the soul's living hand stretched out to take God's unspeakable gift. *Hope* is an evidence of life; it is the soul's living eye opened to expatiate with wonder and with delight among God's mercies set forth in the promises. And *love* is the soul's living heart beating in unison with Christ's heart, and practically joining together earth and heaven.

Now, before leaving this part of the subject, I have to propose to you the question, What is your individual experience with reference to this quickening and its evidences? My friends, we cannot hover between *life* and *death*. *Almost* or *little more than half living* may seem to be the characteristic of some. But still, if there is not *life*, there is the *death* in trespasses and sins. And where faith and hope and love, directed toward Christ, and His truth, and His people, are not to be distinguished among the soul's exercises, there you have the stillness and the torpor and the ghastliness of spiritual death.

2. But now, in the second place, under our present head, we come to speak of the *raising up* which is referred to in the text. 'He hath raised us up together with Christ.' This we also are to consider in the meantime as a present benefit; and as such the expression is to be understood figuratively, as indicating that there is a spiritual change wrought upon believers, which bears some analogy to the literal resurrection of Christ. Then let us mark what the Scripture says upon this subject. The following passage alone might suffice for our purpose: 'We are buried with Christ by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection: knowing this, that our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.' This of itself, we say, might be sufficient for our purpose; but the following may be added: 'We always bear about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the *life* also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh.' And again, 'If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things' which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.' Nothing could be more manifest than that the great practical doctrine revealed in these passages is, that in virtue of the resurrection of Christ, His believing people experience a transformation in heart and soul and spirit, which can be rightly called by no other name than 'their being raised from the dead.' The *quickenings* which we have spoken of under the previous head may be compared to the effect which was produced by the voice of Christ at the grave of Lazarus, when the dead man had life and energy restored to him. The *raising up* which we speak of now may be compared to what took place after—when Lazarus, quickened, came forth again into the fresh air of heaven, encumbered with the vestments of the tomb; and when, at the second bidding of Christ, 'Loose him, and let him go,' he was able to speak and act and follow the Lord, with all the freedom of a living man.

'The being raised up together with Christ,' we would consider therefore as just the development of the spiritual life in

all the feelings, and in the whole character and conduct of His people, in the varied relations in which they stand to Him, and to the Church, and to each other, and to the world. There is a spiritual quickening, and there is a spiritual resurrection.

There is a train of thought which has sometimes suggested itself to us in connection with this subject, and which is fitted to elevate the soul, to which we would allude at present, although the time will not suffer us to follow it out so fully as might be desirable. It is based upon what Paul says in his Epistle to the Romans, vi. 8-11: 'Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him: knowing that Christ, being raised from the dead, dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over Him. For in that He died, He died unto sin once: but in that He liveth, He liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.' The passage is rich in meaning, but the particular point to which we would draw your attention, is the contrast between the condition of Christ previously to His death and *after* His resurrection; and this to illustrate the condition of His people as spiritually raised up from the dead together with Him. Christ's life in this world was a life of suffering and humiliation! He carried about with Him, during the whole period of His earthly ministry, the burden of imputed guilt, so that He might be justly called the man of sorrows. That burden was only removed from Him when He expired upon the cross; *when He died*—as it is rendered in the passage above quoted—*unto sin*, but as the meaning rather is, *in consequence of* sin. Then, when He rose again from the dead, His life was altogether different from what it had been in His estate of humiliation. Every burden was then taken away; triumph and glory were substituted for suffering and ignominy. Now the application we make of all this is, that we are to look for something corresponding to it in the state of Christ's people, when they are said to be raised up together with Him. They are introduced, if we may so speak, into a new sphere of existence, and into a new sphere of action. Their burden, the burden of conscious guilt, is lifted off from their conscience; they are able to look up to heaven with

a humble and a holy confidence; the bandages and garments of the grave are torn away from them; and they can serve God with freedom, and rejoice in His service. They can breathe holy desires, they can think holy thoughts, they can love and admire holy effort in others, they can put forth their activity for the advancement of holy purposes. This is what we would regard as exhibiting in few words the practical import of the expression, 'raised up together with Christ.'

In some respects, it may be thought that there is very little difference between the spiritual quickening and the spiritual resurrection as we have described them. But closer observation will show that there is a vast difference. The man 'raised up with Christ' occupies a far more elevated position than the man merely quickened; or more correctly, you have the believer at a lower stage of his progress in the one case, and in the other at a higher. Faith and hope and love, which are the movements of the quickened soul, and which form the great marks of distinction between it and the soul dead in trespasses and sins, are sometimes but very feebly manifested. You will see indications of spiritual enjoyment, of deliverance from the bondage of sin and of worldliness; you will see struggling effort after what God's law requires, sufficient to justify you in concluding that the man in whom these indications appear is a true follower of Christ. But there is *life* in him, and nothing more. Whereas you will see in another such an energy of faith, such a vigour of hope, such a warmth of love, such a superiority to self and to worldliness, such a freedom and delight in holy exercises, such a manifest enjoyment of the divine word and ordinances, and of communion with God Himself, that you can say, that man is not only quickened by the Spirit, but raised up with Christ.

The man quickened has power given him to crucify the flesh and to overcome sin. The man raised up with Christ is found *exerting* the power; he *does* crucify the flesh, he *does* get the mastery over sin, he has his conversation in heaven. In these remarks we have most imperfectly embodied our conception of what is meant by being raised up with Christ. But we have said enough to show what need there is on the part of Christ's people to awake from that state of cold in-

difference which seems to be the prevailing characteristic of our times. Alas, the symptoms of life are *but few*; the evidences of the spiritual resurrection, which is the parent of high and holy aspiration after God, and of unflagging effort to serve and please and glorify Him, are scarcely at all, or, at the best, but very dimly visible. Verily, we need to offer up the prayer which we are taught in the divine song to use for the larger communications of sanctifying grace: 'Awake, O north wind; and come, thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out.'

3. But now, thirdly, we proceed to speak of the privilege which is described in the words, 'He hath made us to sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.' The text forms a climax, each particular leading to something higher. Christ's people, like all others of the human race in their natural estate dead in sin, are first quickened by the Spirit, next they are raised up with Christ, and then they are permitted to sit in heavenly places with Him. And what we desire in the meantime, is to show that this last privilege, like the two preceding ones, belongs to them *even now*. The language may appear to be too elevated to form an appropriate description of any blessing which believers can claim as their own in this dark world; but we think it will not be impossible to make you feel that we are not extracting more from a beautiful form of expression than it properly yields, or drawing upon fancy at the expense of truth, when we state it as a fact, that those who partake of the spiritual life and the spiritual resurrection may be truly said to have such connection with Christ as may be fitly described by the expression, 'Sitting in heavenly places with Him.' First of all, we can make it manifest from the Scripture that some of God's saints have had such dignity conferred upon them, that you could not well choose better words to represent it than the very words of the text. Thus, for example, take the case of Moses, when, in answer to his prayer, 'I beseech Thee, Lord, show me Thy glory,' he was placed in the cleft of the rock, and beheld, as clearly as human eye could bear it, the radiance by which the immediate presence of Jehovah was signified, and heard the words uttered by the Holy One Himself: 'The Lord, the Lord God, merciful

and gracious, long-suffering, and slow to anger.' By what name would you designate that cleft of the rock, but that of a heavenly place, where Moses was with Christ. Or, again, take the incident recorded also in the Book of Exodus: 'Then went up Moses, and Aaron, and seventy of the elders of Israel: and they saw the God of Israel: and there was under His feet as it were a paved work of a sapphire stone, and as it were the body of heaven in His clearness. And upon the nobles of the children of Israel He laid not His hand: also they saw God, and did eat and drink.' That mountain summit was surely a heavenly place, where the elders of Israel sat down with Christ. Or, again, look to the plain of Dura, in the province of Babylon, where you see a fiery furnace heated seven times, and three youths cast into it, because they will not worship an idol; and where, with the flames blazing around them, you can observe that they remain unhurt, and that a mysterious stranger is with them like unto the Son of God. Would you not say *that* was holy ground, that was a heavenly place, where Christ's faithful ones had His presence with them? Or, descending to New Testament times, turn your eyes toward Mount Tabor, which Christ ascends with His three favoured disciples, Peter, James, and John; observe how, while they are but a short space removed from the busy world below, yet hidden from it by the thick mist which has settled down on the sides of the mountain, they find themselves all at once in a region of holy light, with their Master transfigured, as if He no more belonged to earth but to heaven, and with Moses and Elijah present with Him, and talking of the decease which He was to accomplish at Jerusalem; and tell me if these three were not then made to sit in heavenly places with Christ; and if Peter's desire was not a good one, 'Let us make three tabernacles, and dwell here for ever'? Or, once more, follow the Apostle Paul as he was cast into one of the damp and dark and cold cells in the Mamertine prison at Rome, and listen to him while, as he lay on that chilly floor, that had frozen the very life-blood of many a sufferer before him, he could say, 'I am now ready to be offered up, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness,



which the Lord will give me at that day ;' and say, if the very cell itself was not turned into one of the heavenly places, where the believing disciple was privileged to sit down with Christ ? Then, my friends, with all these examples drawn from the Scripture, in our view, you will not wonder that we should be disposed, in opposition to the opinions of some, to speak of the heavenly places where Christ's people sit with Him as among their present privileges. And now let me advert to one or two illustrations of this truth drawn from the circumstances of believers now.

1. Imagine a man placed in a tower of strength, which has defied the fiercest storms of many centuries ; and that while he is there, the hurricane is raging all around, and sweeping everything before it, he remains unmoved and unalarmed, because he knows that his fortress has resisted sterner blasts. Or, to vary the illustration, imagine a man seated in a quiet bower, while all around is calm and sunshine, and there is nothing to disturb his peaceful meditation, nothing to excite one disquieting thought. To others, in the one case, exposed to the hurricane, the tower would be an image of heaven ; and to such as are doomed to poverty and wretchedness, the quiet harbour, in the other case, would be an image of heaven. Then, to explain these parables, God has provided a refuge for His people, He gives them peace ; while the wicked are like the troubled sea which cannot rest, those who have sought and found reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ, and who have the Holy Spirit bearing witness with their spirit that they are God's children, can say, ' In the Lord put I my trust : ' how say ye to my soul, Flee as a bird to your mountain ? The God of Jacob is my refuge, and underneath the everlasting arms. The Lord is with me, His rod and His staff they comfort me.' Here is the tower of strength, here is the quiet harbour of blessedness and sunshine—peace with God, and hope in God in the midst of the most pressing troubles ; and when a man is in that condition, which verily *is*, although it is not always felt to be, the condition of the believer, may it not be said of him that he is in a heavenly place with Christ ? Oh, let us try more earnestly to reach it.

2. But again, take any true follower of Christ, when he is

engaged in secret prayer, and has grace given him to enter into the full spirit of the exercise, when he can pour out his whole heart to God, and without distraction by worldly thoughts and cares, can realize for a time the presence of the hearer of prayer. It is not often, perhaps, that he can find himself in such an elevated and spiritual frame, for many a prayer is lost through the irruption of wild, irregular, and worldly thoughts; and the believer has often to rise from his knees, with the painful conviction that he has rather been guilty of mocking God, than privileged to offer Him an acceptable service; and that instead of obtaining any nourishment for his soul, he has only been provoking the Lord to withdraw from him the sense of His favour altogether. But there *are* seasons when he is permitted to get near access to God, and with fixed heart can commune with Him. Then, whether his special exercise is the confessing of his sins, or the adoring of the Lord's grace and goodness, or the lifting up of his soul for others, or all combined, he enjoys such freedom combined with such fervour as makes him feel that he is almost in the very sanctuary above, where Christ's servants see His face. We are not very much disposed to make reference to particular cases unless they are recorded in the Scripture. But we think it is impossible to read the memoirs of Brainerd and of Henry Martyn without feeling that these men were often in heavenly places with Christ. What marvellous enlargement of heart they sometimes experienced when they were alone with God! Brainerd made the solitary places of the woods through which he had to pass consecrated spots, where he met with God, and knew that God listened to him; and the other in his closet enjoyed sometimes such divine fellowship that assuredly it was the foretaste of heaven to him. We allude to these experiences for the purpose chiefly of leading you to think what the time of prayer might be in comparison with what it is. The door that was opened in heaven to admit the supplications of God's children in former times is not shut now. The Intercessor is the same. The invitation to come and make Jehovah a partner of all your secrets, which He knows, although He would have you yourselves declare them to Him; the invitation is clear and pressing. Take advantage of it, my friends, I beseech you.

You may convert your secret chambers into places of meeting with God; you may be brought as near to heaven in those sanctuaries where you kneel and speak to Him, as you will ever be, until you are admitted into the full enjoyment of God and of His Christ.

3. But again, there are other heavenly places where Christ is to be met with; as, for example, where His people are engaged in solemn meditation upon His truth. The psalmist speaks 'of remembering the Lord upon his bed, and meditating upon Him in the night watches.' It will fall within the range of the experience of some now hearing me, that, in the quietude of the Sabbath evening, when they had no worldly business intruding on them, they have sometimes been able to fix their minds upon divine things with an intensity and a continuance which at other times they would have sought in vain to reach. Yes; you have meditated then upon the truths of God's Word; you have raised up your souls to holy contemplation; you have felt a marvellous freedom of thought and desire in connection with heavenly realities; you have wondered at yourselves how you enjoyed that Sabbath evening, and have been able to comprehend, in some measure at least, what the apostle says, 'To depart and to be with Christ is far better.' Then we would say, in these circumstances, you have not only spent heavenly hours, but you have been in heavenly places with Christ Jesus, whether, as like the psalmist, meditating upon your bed, or sitting calmly with your Bible in your hand. Alas, my friends, how many unprofitable Sabbaths we do spend, when on every one of them we might be in the heavenly places! How little communion we have with God, when we might be wholly with Him! And how near we might get into fellowship with the redeemed in the upper sanctuary, if we only would make a right use of God's precious gift, the Sabbath.

4. Once more, there is another heavenly place where Christ's people are privileged to enjoy His society even on earth, viz. the spot where, after a strong conflict with temptation, grace has secured the victory for the believer. Sometimes a man is sorely beset. Whatever his condition in life may be, it makes little difference, Satan can reach him with his devices, or the

corrupt heart can put forth its pleadings for indulgence. We can easily conceive the scene of temptation, and the arguments by which the tempter seeks to gain his end. 'This is a small matter,' he whispers, 'be not afraid to take your part in it; no one will know of your error, go forward without fear; better men than you have done the like, yea, have acted immeasurably worse, therefore take your liberty; well, if you do commit sin, will you not have opportunity to repent of it?' These and such like solicitations are put before the followers of Christ to draw them out of the right way. And we say, when a man, whether he be alone or in the company of others, is able to trample under foot all such arguments, and to be steadfast in his integrity, he is a hero in a field of conflict, he is fighting his way to heaven, and, by the help of God, he will reach its glory. And even in the meantime, whether his conflict is secret or open, when he can say to the wicked one, '*No*; I will not commit this wickedness, and sin against God,' you see a man in a heavenly place with Christ Jesus. We might follow out this subject almost without limit. But enough has been said to give prominence to the view which it has been our object to set before you, that the privileges of quickening, and raising up, and being seated in the heavenly places, are all the property of God's people *now*. There is, however, a higher sense in which they will be put within their reach. We had intended to make this a separate subject of meditation, and to show also separately how it is in virtue of their union to Christ that believers enjoy both their present and their future dignity and blessedness. But we must meanwhile in a few sentences blend together all that we had to advance upon these points in the way of practical improvement.

Heaven and earth, different as the ideas are which the two words excite in our minds, are yet in reality most intimately connected in the case of Christ's redeemed people. He is Himself the great link of connection. It is declared upon the testimony of God in His Word, that every one who believeth in Christ is one with Christ. Spirit and soul and body of the believer are Christ's, not merely as His purchased property, but as His very members, as parts of Himself. His people are quickened with Him, as we have seen, having His Spirit put within

them, and abiding in them. They are raised up with Him, as we have seen, exhibiting generally, though imperfectly, the evidence that they are of one *spirit*, so they are of one *life* with Him. They sit with Him, as we have seen, in what must be called heavenly places, in contrast with the condition of those who are still held fast under the dominion of their own unholy lusts and appetites. And these privileges even now belonging to the redeemed are such as might make the ungodly wish to be among them. But let us be silent, my brethren, and look forward, and listen. A mighty angel, with one foot upon the sea and another upon the dry land, swears by Him who liveth for ever and ever, that time shall be no longer; and the Son of man is revealed in all the glory of the Father, and in His own glory, and of the holy angels; and we are all sisted at His tribunal. Then will be disclosed the full import of the blessings we have been contemplating; then will it be seen how close the bond is that joins earth to heaven. The quickening wrought here by the Spirit of God will have its full meaning when the slumbers of the grave are broken; the raising up together with Christ will have its full meaning when the body fashioned like unto Christ's glorious body, and animated by the purified soul, is acknowledged by Him as His own; and the sitting down with Him in the heavenly places will have its full verification when, having made the final separation between the righteous and the wicked, He takes His own people away with Him, to be for ever where He is, to draw life eternal from the fountain of life, to bask for ever in the very sunshine of blessedness, and to love even in heaven increasingly the more they know Him who loved them, and washed them from their sins in His own blood.

And now, my friends, in concluding this discourse, I would ask you with all solemnity, What is your state before God? Have you the quickening Spirit? If you have not, then there is no eternal life for you. Have you been raised up from the mire of pollution to holiness? If you have not, there is no resurrection to glory for you. Have you sat with Christ rejoicing in the peace and pardon which He gives, communing with Him by prayer, meditating upon His perfections, and conquering temptation by His resistless power put forth in

your behalf ? If you have not, then there will be no mansion for you in the heavenly places above. Oh, may the Lord bless you ; may He make this house a place where the dead among you are quickened, where the broken-hearted are healed, where the bowed down are raised up, where multitudes are made the trophies of His grace, and trained up for everlasting glory ! Amen.

## XXIV.

### THE DEATHBED OF DAVID.<sup>1</sup>

1 KINGS II. 1-11.

WE resume at present our consideration of the sacred history, according to the order of time in which the events are recorded. We now see David upon his deathbed, or at least not far from the termination of his pilgrimage. We have been with him when in the midst of the chief men of Israel he gave thanks to Jehovah for the spirit of liberality that had been imparted to himself and to them. We now come to the closing scene of his life. The subject, in one respect, is encompassed with some difficulty; but the first part of it is pleasing, and may be handled without any misgiving, as embodying practical truths of the utmost importance. Vers. 1-4: 'Now the days of David drew nigh that he should die; and he charged Solomon his son, saying, I go the way of all the earth: be thou strong therefore, and show thyself a man; and keep the charge of the Lord thy God, to walk in His ways, to keep His statutes, and His commandments, and His judgments, and His testimonies, as it is written in the law of Moses, that thou mayest prosper in all that thou doest, and whithersoever thou turnest thyself: that the Lord may continue His word which He spake concerning me, saying, If thy children take heed to their way, to walk before me in truth with all their heart and with all their soul, there shall not fail thee (said He) a man on the throne of Israel.' Now, there are many points suggested for our consideration in these verses; but the three following are the most prominent. In the first place, the calmness and quietude of spirit with which

<sup>1</sup> This is one of the first series of lectures on the Old Testament (8th January 1854).

David looks forward to the termination of his life; *secondly*, the special charge which he addresses to Solomon, to be strong, and show himself a man in observing the requirements of the divine law; and *thirdly*, the clear view which he had of the conditional nature of the temporal promises made to Israel, and to his own family in particular. To these three points we shall direct our attention.

I. In the first place, we see the calmness and quietude of spirit with which David looked forward to the termination of his earthly career. 'I go the way of all the earth.' We found him in the last lecture characterizing all men as strangers and sojourners here; and now we have him feeling and acknowledging the reality as affecting himself. There is something very solemn in the announcement, given forth, as it is, in language so simple. A man who had been signally honoured of God to promote His cause in the world,—a man who had exerted his powers to the utmost in working the work of God,—who had occupied the highest place of dignity, and had ennobled the place more than he was ennobled by it, feeling himself to be after all but a frail mortal, says, 'I go the way of all the earth.' He could look into the grave without fear, because the Spirit had taught him to repose confidence in the Redeemer who was to come. He was to be gathered to his fathers; and he could contemplate the event without trembling, because he had the promises of God to feed upon, that his body would not be left in the grave, nor his soul reckoned with but through the Mediator. It is comforting to read of peaceful and hopeful deaths, and it is also profitable to us to keep them in our view. Physicians say that when the end draws nigh, in ordinary circumstances, there is a kind of preparation for it altogether apart from religious hopes and feelings; that the very structure of the bodily frame makes death rather desirable than terrible, when it approaches. But however this may be, there must be a certain condition of soul produced in the man who can contemplate beforehand, as David did, the approach of death, with the feeling that after death is the judgment, and yet speak of it with so much calmness. Now, my friends, to place our-



selves in the position which this man of God occupied, when he said, with as much composure as if he had been retiring to sleep, 'I go the way of all the earth,' we must *first* have sought and found pardoning mercy. A man may die in apparent peace without this, but he cannot *look* forward to death with comfort without it. We must be in Christ, rejoicing in His righteousness, and feeling that we are under the shelter of it, before we can look into the dark valley without fear.

2. And then, secondly, we must have the Spirit of adoption, so as to be able to say, 'Abba Father.' The will of God must be so thoroughly inwrought into our mind as our rule, that we *will* as He would have us, that we are satisfied with all His procedure and with all His arrangements. Then we shall be able to contemplate the end of our earthly career without fear, although with solemn awe.

3. And thirdly, we must be advancing in the practical experience of sanctifying grace, in order to look to the approach of death without terror. It is not a man's progress in the attainment of the likeness of Christ that forms the foundation of his hope toward God. There is but one resting-place for sinners, and that is upon the finished work of Christ. But though a good conscience and growth in grace and holiness do not constitute the *title* to the heavenly inheritance, though they are not and *cannot* be the staff upon which the believer pursues his journey heavenward, they are marvellously useful in driving away alarms and doubts and difficulties. And without the answer of a good conscience, and the Spirit bearing witness with his spirit that he was a child of God, David could not have said with such calmness, 'I go the way of all the earth.' 'The way of all the earth!' It must be our way also. The thought is solemnizing! We must quit this busy scene, as our fathers have done. We must be laid in the grave till the resurrection-morning dawns. Then if we would contemplate the coming end with hope and comfort, let us carry the three things that have been mentioned with us. They are not burdensome; they are assuredly helps in trouble. Let us seek to be in friendship with God through Jesus Christ, pardoned and accepted in Him. Let us cherish the

spirit of filial confidence, making our will subject to the will of Jehovah; and let us strive, with the aid of grace, to purify ourselves more and more from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit; and thus, when the message comes to us, 'You must go the way of all the earth,' we shall hear it without alarm, and regard it as a call from our Father, to come and enjoy the fulness of His house.

II. But we pass on to the second point which is brought out in the text, viz. the special charge which David addresses to Solomon, to show himself a man, and to be strong in observing the requirements of the divine law. 'Be thou strong therefore, and show thyself a man; and keep the charge of the Lord thy God.' The Scripture employs the ordinary forms of human speech in its admonitions and encouragements. Now, on reading the text, one of the expressions that will first seize hold of your mind is, 'Show thyself a man.' It is a form of expression familiar enough to us in common life, but we think peculiarly significant as applied to the concerns of the soul. It is when one desires to stir up another to the exercise of energy and activity that he uses this form of speech, 'Show thyself a man.' And, accordingly, there is always associated with the words the idea of danger or difficulty. David well knew through how many opposing influences the believer must fight his way heavenward; he himself had not come off always scathless in that conflict, and therefore he is the more earnest in admonishing Solomon to be strong, and quit himself like a man. 'Be not disgraced as a coward, but be a man, a determined combatant against what is evil and forbidden,' is the meaning of his address. Now we have one or two remarks to offer upon this part of the subject.

1. In the first place, it is plainly the path of *manly* effort, to strive to serve God, and fulfil the requirements of His law. *Pretended* authority, it is a manly thing to resist and trample on; *rightful* authority, it is a manly thing to honour and uphold. 'Show thyself a man' means, 'Despise all that is low and base, and do that which is honourable and according to the will of God.' Where is the fountain of authority?

It lies in Jehovah. Then the manly part is to do what His Word prescribes, to do that which is right and just and good, and leave men to make their own comment upon what you do.

2. In the second place, it is plainly implied in the words of David that Solomon would have numberless difficulties to contend with. 'Show thyself to be a man' means, 'Resist, fight, overcome.' Now, here we must pause for a moment to look at the man contending, and the force that is mustered against him. All the power of Satan, which comprehends whatever of evil influence hell can send forth; all the power of this world, which implies agencies innumerable tempting to evil; and withal a corrupt heart within,—all these powers are put forth against the poor follower of Christ. It would be utterly impossible for him to withstand or to gain the victory in such a contest if he were left to himself. But the Lord, who has called him to the battle, has also provided the needful armour. The loins are girt with truth; there is the breastplate of righteousness; there is the preparation of the gospel of peace for the feet; and there is the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God. We have taken the account of the Christian equipment from the New Testament; but there is not one particular that could be spared, when we look to the injunction of David in the text, and connect with it the dangers that have to be overcome. It were a commandment altogether beyond the reach of the creature, 'Show thyself a man,' if the armour were not provided in which a man may successfully contend. But it is provided, and it is bestowed.

3. Then, in the third place, be it remembered that while one may say to another, 'Be strong, quit yourself like a man; here is the armour, take it and use it,' there is another question not to be overlooked: Have you received the Holy Spirit? Nothing could be easier than to mark out the whole field of spiritual conflict,—nothing easier than to describe the virtue of the several pieces of armour with which the Lord clothes His people; but after all, unless the Spirit is in the man, the pieces of armour are useless, and the conflict must terminate in defeat and ruin. If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His; and *where* the Spirit of the Lord is, and

*there* only, there is liberty,—liberty, power to use the helps which the Lord gives to His people in their difficulties.

III. Then we come to the third general proposition which is brought out in the text, viz. the clear perception which David evidently had of the conditional nature of the promises made to Israel, and to his own family in particular. ‘Keep the charge of the Lord, as it is written in the law of Moses, that thou mayest prosper in all that thou doest, and whithersoever thou turnest thyself: that the Lord may continue His word which He spake concerning me, saying, If thy children take heed to their way, to walk before me in truth with all their heart and with all their soul, there shall not fail thee (said He) a man on the throne of Israel.’ We have frequently had occasion to advert to this topic, and therefore we shall not go into the consideration of it at any length in the meantime. It brings before us the great principle which pervaded the Old Testament economy, in so far as the temporal interests of the Jews were concerned; and it is satisfactory to see how completely David acquiesced in it, as affecting the destinies of his own family. The promises and blessings of the spiritual covenant—the covenant of grace—he knew to be unchangeable, well ordered, and sure. The gifts and calling of God, with reference to the final salvation of sinners, he was aware were ‘without repentance.’ The fountain of redeeming love he was satisfied could not be dried up. But the particular dispensation under which the Israelites were placed as a nation, and the special favour which had been shown toward himself and his house, whereby they were to enjoy the supreme authority, he regarded as standing altogether upon a different basis. The faithful observance of the precepts of the law of Moses formed the condition upon which Israel was to continue great and flourishing, and on which the members of his family were to enjoy the honours of royalty. And with this conviction full in his mind, he delivers to Solomon the admonition which we have in the text. Solomon, alas! forgot it, and the consequence was, that ten of the tribes cast off their allegiance to the house of David. Too many of his successors forgot it, and hence came the seventy years’ captivity. The

whole nation forgot it, refusing to listen to the great prophet, whose appearance Moses had foretold, and hence their dispersion and their sufferings to the present day.

In connection with this subject, we have judged it necessary from time to time to remind you, that unless you read the prophetic books with a clear apprehension of the difference between the *covenant of grace*, whereby the salvation of sinners who believe in Jesus is secured, and the *temporal covenant*, in virtue of which the seed of Abraham enjoyed their peculiar earthly privileges, you will be in danger of misapplying Scripture, and falling into ruinous error as to the ground of a sinner's acceptance with God. The conditions of the covenant of grace—viz. perfect obedience to the law, and submission to its penalty—have been fulfilled by the Mediator; and the benefit of His work is enjoyed by all who believe in Him as thoroughly as if they themselves had performed the work. In the other case, that of the *temporal covenant*, it was a personal obedience that was required; and because it was not given, the punishments which had been threatened were inflicted.

And the principal application which we have to make of the temporal covenant to our own condition is this, that according to the measure of our faithfulness in serving and glorifying God, according to our spiritual fruitfulness, will be the measure of comfort we enjoy in the life of faith. The nearer we live to God, the more we shall be blessed with the light of His countenance. But for pardon and acceptance, and all needful grace, we must look exclusively to Him who was able to say on Calvary, 'It is finished.'

But we must now proceed to consider vers. 5-9: 'Moreover, thou knowest also what Joab the son of Zeruiah did to me, and what he did to the two captains of the hosts of Israel, unto Abner the son of Ner, and unto Amasa the son of Jether, whom he slew, and shed the blood of war in peace. . . . Do therefore according to thy wisdom, and let not his hoar head go down to the grave in peace. But show kindness unto the sons of Barzillai the Gileadite, and let them be of those that eat at thy table; for so they came to me when I fled because of Absalom thy brother. And, behold, thou hast with thee Shimei

the son of Gera, a Benjamite of Bahurim, which cursed me with a grievous curse in the day when I went to Mahanaim. . . . Now therefore hold him not guiltless ; for thou art a wise man, and knowest what thou oughtest to do unto him ; but his hoar head bring thou down to the grave with blood.' Now, it is in the interpretation of some of these verses that we find our chief difficulty. The difficulty, indeed, suggests itself at once to every intelligent reader of the passage. David was soon to pass into the eternal state, and he knew it. Do these injunctions, then, which he laid upon Solomon, respecting Joab and Shimei, indicate such a spirit as should have been manifested by a believer, by a man who occupied so prominent a place in the Church as David did ? That is the question which requires to be solved. As to what he says regarding Barzillai, there is no difficulty. He had received substantial acts of kindness from this man when he was in trouble ; and we rejoice to see him remembering it, and binding the law of gratitude upon the heart of Solomon. The expression of such feelings as he cherishes towards the family of his friend is in every respect becoming the man and the occasion and all the circumstances. But we cannot so easily dispose of the other particulars alluded to in these verses. We cannot promise satisfactorily to vindicate the conduct of David to every mind, but we shall offer one or two remarks that may tend to the illustration of the subject.

1. In the first place, then, let it be remembered that although the words before us were unquestionably spoken by David as they are here recorded, there is nothing to justify the supposition that they were spoken by the immediate special suggestion of the Divine Spirit. We have had occasion before to draw your attention to the distinction that must be made between the Scripture *as an inspired record* (which we hold it to be, in the most emphatic and absolute sense of the words), and many particular sayings and deeds which are noted in it. David, as we know full well, often spoke rashly, and acted foolishly and sinfully ; and all this is recorded, not to be imitated by us, but to serve as a warning to us. In the instance in hand, we have to regard him as dictating to Solomon certain counsels of policy, not by divine wisdom, but of his own

mind ; and whether these counsels were right or wrong, we must lay the responsibility of them altogether upon David himself.

2. In the second place, let it be remembered that David, with all his excellences, lived under a darker dispensation than that which it is our privilege to enjoy. The fruits of faith and hope and love were yielded indeed in those times when he flourished ; but under the gospel their colours have been mellowed and softened, and they have altogether been rendered more pleasing and more attractive than they were before. The example of Christ is now the light to guide believers in the path of practical duty, although it is one of the reproaches which may be justly brought against us, that with all our privileges, and with our opportunities of knowing the truth, we are yet so far behind in practical godliness, and so much in the dark with respect to the truth itself.

Our inference from all this would be, that if the feeling should suggest itself to any one that David here exhibited a spirit of vindictiveness which was unbecoming, it might lead toward a correct, and certainly toward a charitable, conclusion in the matter, if this were fully thought of, that he lived not in the New Testament ages ; that it was first from the cross that the lesson was given, in all its significance, of what is to be understood by the forgiveness of wrongs, when the Redeemer prayed for His enemies, saying, ‘ Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.’

3. But now, in the third place, while we have made the preceding observations for the purpose of removing out of the way some of the difficulties which serious readers of the Scripture may feel to rest upon this particular passage, we think that, taking all the particular circumstances into account, these admonitions of David to Solomon, with respect to Joab and Shimei, are not so much to be wondered at. It was but right, and natural also, that the king should instruct his son in matters pertaining to the welfare and safety of the kingdom. Now, with respect to Joab, it will not be forgotten that he had joined the party of Adonijah, whose object it was to set aside Solomon as heir to the throne, and to confer the dignity upon his brother. It is to be noticed also, that Joab had

rendered himself liable to the vengeance of the law for slaying Abner and Amasa. *That* sentence should have been executed long before this time. But Joab was David's near relative—he was his sister's son. He had been very useful to the king; he had exhibited such devotion for David and for the good of Israel, that the king had felt unwilling to visit him with the punishment due to his crimes. And therefore he transfers the duty to Solomon, with these two reflections in his mind—first, that Joab should have suffered the penalty which he deserved long before; and secondly, that, with his leanings toward the party of Adonijah, he might endanger the peace of the government of Solomon. It would not be accounted a revengeful or unbecoming act if a sovereign used his pen on his deathbed, and for the last time, to sign the death-warrant of a criminal who deserved to die. And when we look at Joab's career, and at David's forbearance toward him, we rather pity the weakness which spared the guilty man so long, than wonder at the decision which was come to in the end, in accordance with the requirement of the universal law, 'Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed.'

You will notice that in the charges which David states against Joab, there is no reference made to his slaying of Absalom. The two cases of murder mentioned, which the captain of the host had perpetrated, are those only of the individuals whom he had slain in cold blood. But that there may be a reference to Absalom's death in the words at the beginning of ver. 5, 'Thou knowest also what Joab the son of Zeruiah did to me,' we think not at all improbable. Yet, in his procedure against the rebel, Joab was not to be blamed. He was not chargeable with murder when he slew Absalom, in the same sense that he lay under the charge with the blood of Abner and Amasa upon him. But David might feel that he who had been so unscrupulous in one instance, when he had been positively forbidden to put forth his hand, might be as unscrupulous while following the interests of Adonijah against Solomon. And therefore, looking at the whole case, we feel that this only is to be regretted, that the bloodthirsty man was not punished before by him to whom the *power* and



the *duty* of punishing both belonged ; that *that* should have been reserved for the time of Solomon, which ought to have been done, and might have been righteously done, in the time of David himself.

But with regard to the injunction concerning Shimei, we do not feel that we have so much liberty to speak. It may have been, as some suppose, that David had fears that Shimei might disturb the peace of Solomon's reign, belonging as he did to the tribe of Benjamin, and grudging the advancement of the tribe of Judah to the supremacy.

This, however, is to be noticed, that he does not seem to have been chargeable with any treasonable act, either when Absalom rebelled or when Adonijah set up his claim to reign. It was against the house of David, and in behalf of the house of Saul, of which he was a member, that Shimei appeared, when he cursed the king as he fled from Jerusalem. But we have no precise information upon these points. There may have been reasons which led David to suspect Shimei as a man dangerous to the public welfare ; grounds of suspicion without overt act which prompted him to give to Solomon the counsel which we read in the text. But now, looking at the whole subject, we feel that the passage which we have been reviewing is one of those which authenticate the inspired writings. If the varied scenes of David's life and death had been presented to us with such a representation of the man as would have made him almost perfect, we would have been distrustful of the integrity of the narrative. But when we find this remarkable man, in life and death, contending as we ourselves have to do, and *will* have to do while we are here, we feel that this is at least one argument to establish the truth of the record.

But we cannot leave the passage without dwelling for a few moments upon the solemn realities which it suggests to our minds. We have already hinted—it is impossible to prove it fully, but it is altogether probable—that the admonitions which David gave to Solomon as to his dealing toward Joab and Shimei, may have been as really needful as the message was grateful which he left respecting the family of Barzillai the Gileadite. But be this as it may, we are now beside the

deathbed of one of the greatest men that ever lived. When that pulse ceases to vibrate, the first man in Israel is gone ; when that heart no longer beats, one of the largest and kindest and tenderest hearts that ever beat is lifeless. Before the end the patriarch speaks, and be his speech blamable or praiseworthy—we pretend not to pronounce an absolute opinion,—it is marked by this characteristic, showing the complete possession which he had of all his mental energy at the trying time, that he could speak both of friends and of enemies distinctively. He did not confound or lose sight of the difference between right and wrong upon his deathbed ; he did not suppose that all men were to be regarded as equally good and estimable, because he himself was about to quit this mortal scene. *This* we would specially notice, as perhaps the great lesson which is to be learnt from his deathbed. He does not hail *every* one as his friend ; he will not have communion with the bloody and deceitful man. Now that feeling, if it is rightfully indulged during life, may be rightfully cherished and expressed at death. A believer will not recognise as the followers of Christ those whom he must disown when the great day of discrimination comes.

Is there a cloud to rest upon David's deathbed because he would have Joab and Shimei punished according to their sin ? We shall not presume to decide the question ; but we must say this, that it forms no part of a deathbed testimony that the good and the bad should be dealt with alike ; and we hold that that should not be called a revengeful feeling which prompts a man to give, even on his deathbed, his strong verdict against the workers of iniquity.

But we prosecute these remarks no further. The aged king died. It was not exactly at the time that he gave his last charge to Solomon that his change came. There was evidently ample space furnished to him to have personal dealing with his redeeming God. And we doubt not but he had power given to him to realize the full import of the words which he had been privileged to write many years before : ' Yea, though I walk through the dark valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil : for Thou art with me ; Thy rod and Thy staff, they comfort me.'

We proceed to consider vers. 10 and 11: 'So David slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David. And the days that David reigned over Israel were forty years: seven years reigned he in Hebron, and thirty and three years reigned he in Jerusalem.'

We cannot pass from the consideration of the history of this illustrious man without offering one or two special remarks upon it. We have now traced it in its progress from the time that the youth of ruddy countenance was sent for to appear before Samuel, the Lord's prophet, and when he was anointed by the prophet to be the king of Israel, down to the time of his departure, when, having served his generation by the will of God, he fell asleep.

You will remember the purport of that striking chapter, the 5th of Genesis, where we have the life and death of all the antediluvian patriarchs recorded. It must have been inserted to teach us that birth and death are the two great incidents in the history of man; and that whatever else falls to his lot may be considered as almost unworthy of notice. And so here in the text: 'David slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David.'

Now we feel, in one sense, as if we had parted from David; in another sense we feel as if we could never lose sight of him. We leave him here, in so far as the history of his personal transactions is concerned; but we can never leave him, or forget him, when we look to his psalms, those ever-living teachers and comforters and purifiers of the Church.

And now let us take the opportunity, in concluding the present discourse, to notice one or two of the most prominent features of his character. It might furnish a study for a long time, and supply the materials for many discourses; but we shall not attempt to do more than to give at present one or two of the most distinguishing marks of this servant of God. Let it be noticed, however, at the very outset, that you will find such stains and defilement cleaving to him, that you will be almost constrained to ask, Can that have been a believer? Again, however, you will see, on the other hand, such firm perseverance in the way of honouring God, such exercises of

heart and soul in communion with God, as to make you feel a man of God is here.

1. In the first place, David seems to have had *early* experience of a work of grace upon his heart. We would not regard his successful conflicts with the lion and the bear, while he kept his father's flock, as necessarily indicating more than that he had a general trust in the power of Jehovah to help. But when he comes forward, still little more than a mere stripling, to contend with the champion of the Philistines, we can learn, from his mode of speaking, that he knew the truth, and that he was full of faith. We have the fact, however, more distinctly declared in Ps. lxxi : 'Thou art my hope, O Lord God : Thou art my trust from my youth.'

2. Then, in the second place, we perceive him manifesting the power of religion while he lived at the court of Saul ; and acting in such a way, amid many temptations to unfaithfulness, as to render his name fragrant among the people of Israel. Sorely tried, he was enabled to maintain his integrity, and to make his enemies more afraid of *him* than he was of *them*.

3. In the third place, during the long season of persecution to which he was subjected, we perceive him acquiring more and more the confidence of those with whom he was brought in contact ; and making it appear that the religion of the Israelites was from heaven, because it raised him and his followers to a higher level than the idolaters among whom it was sometimes their lot to live.

4. In the fourth place, when he came to the throne, it was then especially that he went astray. A man of keen feelings and of strong impulses, he was unable to contend against temptations in the palace, which he would have trampled under foot when he was a sojourner in the land, persecuted by Saul.

5. But let us not forget, in the fifth place, that if he sinned in the palace, *there* also he repented. And that it is only from the period of *his* reign that we are able to trace the observance of the Mosaic law in all its requirements in the land of Israel.

And let this be added, finally, that during the whole of his eventful life, David had his thoughts directed toward the service of God. When he was driven from place to place he

still found time to write in celebration of Jehovah's praise. When he came to the kingdom, he gladly laid down the sceptre for the pen, that he might praise the Lord, and teach others to praise Him.

It is supposed by many that the 72d Psalm was the last of David's compositions in the order of time. The concluding words of it would seem to justify the supposition. It may have been the deathbed hymn of the sweet singer of Israel, after he had warned Solomon, as we have seen, perhaps with somewhat too much of the old leaven still working in his heart. But there is no feeling breathed in this psalm which is not suitable to the deathbed of a saint. It is a psalm in honour of Christ, and prophetic of the increase of His kingdom. These are the concluding words of it: 'His name shall endure for ever: His name shall be continued as long as the sun: and men shall be blessed in Him: all nations shall call Him blessed. Blessed be the Lord God, the God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things. And blessed be His glorious name for ever: and let the whole earth be filled with His glory: Amen, and Amen. The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended.' If this was the last composition of the king of Israel, how appropriately it concludes the whole series of his writings! The spread of the truth; the triumphs of Messiah's kingdom; the subjugation of the whole world to the authority of Christ,—these form the themes of the last prayer of David the son of Jesse. There is no reference to Joab or Shimei here; the whole soul is concentrated upon Christ; and to have Him magnified is David's great concern.

Now, my friends, we have merely indicated in these few brief remarks what we feel it might have been profitable to enlarge upon in connection with David's history. His name must ever be kept in remembrance. There are very many names that you might select as invested with interest in the Old Testament narrative. But there are a few that can never be mentioned without peculiar interest. There is Enoch, among the people before the flood. There is Noah, who forms the connecting link between those who lived before and after the flood. There is Abraham, the head of the patriarchs after the flood. There is Jacob, his grandson, worthy of special notice. There

is Moses, greater than all before him. There is Joshua, who carried Israel into Canaan. There is Samuel, who endeavoured to order the worship of God ; and there is David, his scholar, who perfected what Samuel was not able to accomplish. These are the chief men in the Old Testament history. After David, we have the names of some men, great and excellent ; but we have no name like *his*. Now, I beseech you, mark this truth, that while these worthies lived, they lived to some purpose ; and when they died, they left some memorial after them. They were all frail mortals, like ourselves ; but they had each a spiritual characteristic, which has been preserved in the word of truth. *Enoch* walked with God ; *Noah* was a just man in his generation, and a preacher of righteousness. *Abraham* was the *friend* of God. *Jacob* had power with God, and was called *Israel*, because as a prince with God he wrestled in prayer and overcame. *Moses* was admitted to closest communion with God ; the Lord spake to him as a man to his friend. *Joshua* had the presence of the great Captain of the host with Him. *Samuel* had God speaking to him from his childhood, and was able to say, ‘Speak, Lord, Thy servant heareth.’ And *David* was the man after God’s own heart. All these have been called home, and are enjoying the heavenly rest. Let us strive to follow them ; looking, as they did, ‘to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.’ It is indeed a melancholy fact, that the more fully the history of believers is given in the sacred record, the more obvious are the marks of corruption in the men. But though the enemies of the truth may rejoice in this, let not the professed followers of Christ take any comfort from this fact, as if they might live in sin, and yet be true disciples. That cannot be. No ; if we would be with Christ, we must go after Him ; loving what He loves, willing as He wills, and growing in His likeness. Amen.

## XXV.

### THE SOUL IN PRISON, ITS DELIVERANCE, AND THE EFFECTS OF IT.

‘Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise Thy name.’—Ps. cxlii. 7.

WE are informed in the title of this psalm, that it was a prayer of David when he was in the cave—that is, either when he was in the cave of Adullam, to which he fled when the enmity of Saul rendered it unsafe for him to reside in any of the cities of Israel; or when he took refuge, on another occasion, in another cave, to escape from the king, who had come forth with a great host in pursuit of him. The language of the psalm is altogether suitable to the circumstances of the writer at either of these periods of his history; but we shall not stop to illustrate it, or make any particular application of it, with mere reference to the temporal condition of the psalmist. He might well say, when he was hunted from place to place by his relentless persecutor, and compelled to hide himself in the cave in the wilderness, ‘Bring my soul out of prison, that I may praise Thy name.’ But there is a higher sense in which his words may be understood, and which most probably he himself also had in view when he wrote them. We find in most of his psalms that the allusions he makes to things temporal are, as it were, a thin veil spread out, through which the spiritual eye can discern the great realities of the spiritual life, and all the varied phases of the deepest spiritual experience. And so here in the text, we regard him as speaking of a state yet darker and more desolate than that to which he was reduced in the cave, when he prays, ‘Bring my soul out of prison;’ and as meditating thanksgiving for something far more excellent than any temporal deliverance, when he adds, ‘That I may praise Thy name.’ It is to his words, then, in the

obvious spiritual application which may be made of them, that I would direct your attention in this discourse; and may the Spirit accompany our exercise with His blessing. We may arrange our remarks under the following heads: *first*, the soul in prison; *second*, some things connected with the deliverance; and *thirdly*, the effects of the deliverance.

I. In the first place, then, let us consider what is to be understood by 'the soul in prison.' Now the ideas suggested by the word prison are such as these: deprivation of liberty, severe and gloomy restraint, exclusion from all sources of ordinary comfort and enjoyment. We may say also, that there is usually associated with it the idea of degradation and infamy. We are led then by the text to connect these ideas of bondage, restraint, discomfort, degradation, and infamy, with certain states of the soul, or certain experiences through which it may sometimes have to pass. This is what the psalmist teaches us, when he speaks of the soul's being in prison. Let us therefore select one or two cases for the purpose of illustrating the subject.

It is a common remark, that nothing can chain thought; and that however deep the brand of slavery may be printed in the flesh, the soul cannot be enslaved. And in one sense it is true. The man who has been quickened by the Spirit of God has freedom of thought; and whether he be immured in a dungeon or treated as a slave, his soul can soar upward on the wings of faith, and hold immediate communion with the Lord. But such exalted exercise is the exclusive privilege of those in whom the Spirit dwells, and who by His mighty working have been made alive from the dead, and renewed in the spirit of their mind. And even *they* can but sometimes maintain a frame of mind so holy and heavenly! As we shall afterwards see, even *they* have often good cause to pray that their soul may be brought out of prison. But to come to the subject more immediately before us.

1. Look, in the first place, at the spiritual condition of those who are yet without Christ, and therefore unrenewed. They seem of all others to be the least subjected to control of any kind. They follow the bent of their own inclinations, as if their



will were supreme, and none could interfere with their movements, or say to them, What doest thou ? All that is in the world, the lust of the eye, and the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life, so far as they have means and opportunity, forms the object of their unbridled pursuit ; or if they do submit to restraint, their submission is wrung from them more from fear of the present and future consequences of their actions to themselves, than from any reverence for the law and authority of God. Altogether, on a hasty glance at the life of an ungodly man, the inexperienced would be ready to conclude, that he was not fettered as those are who love and serve the Lord. His career, superficially observed, appears to be one of absolute freedom. But let us look more closely, and we shall be drawn to a very different conclusion. As we have already said, it is in the region of thought, in the power the soul has to exert its faculties, in the control that can be exercised over the affections, in the freedom of the will to choose or to refuse, that true liberty is to be sought for ; and if there be restraint or abridgment of power in any of these respects, there is bondage, there is imprisonment. Now, how stands the case with the unconverted ? Are their thoughts free ? Are their affections and desires so well ordered, that with little effort and reluctance they can forego their objects, when these are represented to them as sinful or unlawful ? When they are even convinced that the courses they pursue are hurtful to them, and must end in misery ; and when they have resolved to be wiser in time to come, and to exercise self-restraint, does a mere act of the will suffice for the rejection of one course and the choosing of another ? Ah, my friends, the picture of the godless man, whether as drawn in the Scripture or as presented to us in the broad light of experience, stands out in colours very different from these. The Scripture represents him as a very slave, as a captive, as in prison. ‘Whosoever committeth sin is the servant, *i.e.* the slave of sin.’ Of the unregenerate it is said that they are ‘ensnared by the devil, and led captive by him at his will.’ And as one object of the mission and work of Christ is declared by Isaiah to be, ‘To bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison-house,’ it is obvious that the spiritual condition

of those who are to be the trophies of His power and grace is truly described when they are said to be shut up in prison. Yes, the soul tainted with guilt, loaded with corruption, blind, debased, carnalized,—as every soul is that has not been quickened by the life-giving Spirit, and washed in the blood of Jesus,—has no more *real* freedom of movement than the poor captive in his dungeon, who is confined within the few paces which his chain suffers him to take, and can get no farther than a certain range. And while they are drudging in his service, Satan seems to allow sinners to walk at liberty; but they cannot go beyond the limits he has marked out for them. They are shut up, as it were, within an enclosure surrounded by walls, so high that there is no looking over them. All that the carnal mind, the depraved heart, and the fleshly nature seek to gratify them, may be found for a season in that enclosure; but not a glimpse can be obtained beyond it of the world of sunshine and true happiness. The carnal man, the slave of sin, cannot raise his thoughts to heaven, and meditate upon the holy character of Jehovah; there is an influence that drags and keeps them down, and makes them contented to feed upon the sensuality and the vanities of earth. He cannot *love* what is morally pure and excellent and beautiful; there is a principle of repulsiveness to it in his very nature; so that, as the Bible tells us, his very nature must be changed—he must be born again of the Spirit before he can love even the holy God Himself. And should he at any time, in a moment of calm reflection, feel convinced that he is treading a dangerous path, and resolve to enter on a course of well-doing, the taste for old pleasures and the company of old associates will annihilate his purpose in an instant, and make him what he *was*, the slave of sin, the prisoner of Satan.

What awful darkness, then, there is in the soul unrenewed by grace; what crushing restraint clogging the exercise of its noblest powers; and what degradation withal, in its being so completely under the power of evil influences and besetting sins! There is not another term by which you could more fitly describe its condition, than when you say that it is a ‘soul in prison.’ But now, is there no interruption of the dark monotony of the soul’s prison-house? Are there no pangs felt while it is thus

kept in fetters, no aspirations to get beyond the ignominious chain that hinders its free movement? Yes, sometimes there are. Sometimes the conviction will flash upon the mind of the sinner, that the end of these things is death. Sometimes a storm of self-condemnation and remorse will be stirred up within him, so that he trembles to think of the future, and would purchase spiritual liberty and peace at any price. But then, alas! the enemy who holds him in his grasp, and who will not easily let go his prey, suggests that good resolutions for the future will compensate for the past; and accordingly, by good resolutions, the storm within is allayed for the time, although these resolutions will all be swept away by the first breath of temptation, like the frail cobweb before the wind. Oh, how different might the result be, if, when the bitterness of the spiritual bondage is felt, and something like self-loathing is excited in the soul, the sinner, conscious of his own helplessness, would look upward, and cry in earnest, 'Bring my soul out of prison, O Lord; for in Thee alone is my help.' That earnest cry, rising as from the depths to the mercy-seat, and there graciously received, might then mark a new era in the sinner's history,—his transition from bondage to liberty, from death to life,—when he heard, as it were, these words returned in answer, 'There is mercy with the Lord, that He may be feared, and plenteous redemption.'

But we must not forget, that while the words of the text find an illustration in the case of those who at present are alienated from God, by the unsubdued corruption of their hearts, and by wicked works, they are designed more especially to apply to certain states and experiences of *believers*. Of them, too, it may be sometimes said that their soul is in prison.

2. I remark, therefore, in the second place, that this expression holds good respecting believers, when selfishness or worldliness having for a season gained the ascendancy, they lose that sensible comfort and enjoyment which they once had in religion, and feel as if they were plunged into darkness. They may not, perhaps, be chargeable with any open transgression of the law of God; they may not cease to go through the ordinary routine of duty, so far as public ordinances and

the private reading of the Word and prayer are concerned. There may be scarcely anything to indicate a falling away to those among whom they live. But the entanglements of worldly business, the anxiety to secure a competency before age and weakness come, the selfish love of ease and personal comfort, the attractions of worldly society, may meanwhile be silently eating out the very heart and spirit of their religion. Often do we hear those, of the sincerity of whose religious impressions we can entertain no doubt, complaining that their hearts have waxed cold ; that they cannot feel that interest in the truth which they once felt ; that their hopes are not so bright and cheering as they used to be ; that they have less freedom in prayer and other sacred exercises than they had ; and that they feel, as it were, a drag upon all their efforts to serve Christ, which they cannot account for. And then, with this painful consciousness, that a blighting change has passed over them, there come painful doubts and questionings whether they have not all along been deceiving themselves with a name to live, while they have never been quickened. And the thought of death fills them with alarm. Thus they go about as dead among the living ; holding the truth indeed, but neither invigorated nor comforted by it ; and acknowledging the love of Christ, while there is no warm response to it from their own hearts. Such is the condition of many a believer ; a condition to which he reduces himself, not unfrequently at least, as we have said above, by yielding to the insidious influence of worldliness and selfishness. Many references are made in the Scripture to this melancholy department of spiritual experience. The psalmist complains that ‘his soul cleaved to the dust.’ The prophet Isaiah speaks of some who feared the Lord, ‘as walking in darkness and having no light.’ But no description of such a state as we have above referred to could be more graphic than that given in the text, when it speaks of ‘the soul in prison.’ All freedom of intercourse with God is gone ; all high and holy longings for more knowledge of Christ, and greater conformity to His image, are for the time suppressed ; all active exertion for the extension of His kingdom is paralyzed ; and the cold and formal round of duty is substituted for the willing and fervid and living religion of the

heart. Bound in the fetters of worldliness, and confined by the chain of selfishness, the professed disciple of Christ hears with apathy the call of his Master to him, to arouse himself, and go forth to the spiritual conflict; he beholds a world lying in sin and wretchedness, but he justifies himself for his indifference by saying that there are others better fitted to occupy the field of active labour there than he is; he is solicited to aid in the furtherance of the great schemes of Christian enterprise at home and abroad, but most sparingly and reluctantly he gives, as if giving were not a privilege, but tended to his impoverishment.

We read that the candle of the Lord shines in the tabernacles of the righteous, diffusing light and joy and blessedness. But how can it shine in the prison which the soul has thus constructed for itself? How can there be light and joy when the soul's intercourse with God has degenerated into a matter of cold and heartless form, and the rays of heaven's truth and love are excluded by the opposing walls of the soul's own rearing? My friends, if we have in any measure described above the condition of any now present, let us entreat them to take home the lesson, and improve it. What awful degradation is it for those who might be expected to be among the foremost in advancing the cause that is dear to Christ, to lie inactive! What dishonour to submit to a state of bondage, by which all generous and holy exertion is cramped and crushed! What misery to be shut out from the free use of the word of life, and the free exercise of prayer! What disgrace to lie in the dust of the prison-house when you might be at liberty, serving and glorifying the Saviour, and soaring heavenward! Hear the word of the Lord, calling you to come forth from the bondage of corruption into glorious liberty: 'Shake thyself from the dust; arise, and loose thyself from the bands of thy neck, O captive daughter of Zion.' And let your reply to the heart-stirring call be, 'O Lord, deliver my soul out of prison; and quicken me, according to Thy word.'

3. Again, in the third place, I remark that the expression in the text holds good especially in the case of those who, through the neglect of watchfulness, are betrayed into the commission of sins which wound the conscience, and thus destroy the

soul's peace and comfort and freedom. This may be thought merely a repetition of what was advanced under the previous head. And certainly there is a resemblance between the two particulars ; but there is also such a difference as will lead us to pursue a different train of thought. In the previous case, we viewed the soul's imprisonment as consisting in a state of apathy and indifference ; in a withholding of all active effort in behalf of Christ ; and in thus being shut out from the enjoyment of spiritual comfort and gladness. In the present instance, we look to those of Christ's professed followers who, by the power of temptation, being drawn into sins from which they seemed to have escaped, and which are such as to inflict sore wounds upon the conscience, have the soul sunk into the depths, and disqualified for a season for all spiritual exercises. Cases of this kind occur too frequently.

While the general condition of the soul must be described as one of weakness, viewed with relation to the corruption that still adheres to it, and the temptations to which it is exposed, there are certain peculiarly weak points, through which the enemy can most easily find access to it. Prayer and watchfulness, which are necessary that he may be prevented from getting the advantage at any point, are tenfold more indispensable where there is a conscious weakness felt. But, unhappily, they are sometimes intermitted. The believer becomes self-confident. He has been enabled to hold out successfully against the tempter's allurements for a time ; and supposing that he is now secure, he is thrown off his guard. He is assailed ; he falls. Then come remorse and fear and self-reproach. Look at the man who, after a fair profession, has been enticed into sin, and you have before you a picture of absolute misery. He cannot venture to pray, for he thinks God will not hear him ; when he opens his Bible, it speaks daggers to him ; when the love of God in Christ suggests itself to his mind, he is overwhelmed with shame. He feels himself shut up under wrath ; and all is darkness around him. All energy and activity have deserted him, under the lash of conscience ; he is unfitted for every duty. When he would seek relief in conversation or in reading, at every short interval the remembrance of his sin recurs, and the soul is thrown

back upon her own dismal meditations. In a word, he may be said to be hemmed in on every side, restrained and fettered, so that he cannot exert his powers. And this, my friends, is 'the soul in prison.' It is a dismal state; and it demonstrates most strikingly the foolishness of sin, and the misery which is the fruit of it. Jonah's language, when he was shut up in his living prison, and was bewailing his miserable estate, is such as the soul in the condition we have described might justly appropriate: 'Thou hast cast me into the deep; and the floods compassed me about: all Thy billows and Thy waves passed over me. Then I said, I am cast out of Thy sight.' But if the prophet's words portray something like the experience of those who have been drawn into sin, and are doomed for a season to taste its bitterness, there are also words employed in his prayer which point to the way of escape: 'I am cast out of Thy sight; yet will I look again toward Thy holy temple. When my soul fainted within me, I remembered the Lord.' So let the self-condemned transgressor, whose sins compass him about, cry with the psalmist, 'O Lord, bring my soul out of prison. O remember not against me former iniquities: let Thy tender mercies speedily prevent me: for I am brought very low. Help me, O God of salvation: and deliver me, and purge away my sins, for Thy name's sake.'

4. Once more, in the fourth place, I remark that the expression in the text may be applied to the case of those who, from their peculiar mental temperament, and perhaps partly from other causes, habitually take a gloomy view of their own spiritual state, and are thus strangers to all joy and peace in believing. As with reference to worldly affairs, you will find some men of a sanguine and buoyant disposition, who never allow themselves to be depressed by the difficulties with which they have to grapple, but brave them with good heart, while others see nothing but ruin in the slightest reverse, and bode evil even when there is no symptom of its approach; so in spiritual things, while there are cheerful and lively Christians, whose faith and hope sustain them in times of trial, and who are witnesses to the truth that the belief of the gospel is the pathway to real happiness, there are others who feel so keenly the power of heart-corruption, and the heinousness of their

positive transgressions, in connection with the holiness and inflexibility of the law of God, that they live in a state of continual gloom and depression. Their faith, which is indeed but as a grain of mustard seed, realizes and trembles at the threatenings of the Word of God; but somehow it seems to be repelled by the promises; it acknowledges Christ to be the Saviour of sinners, but it does not look fully and broadly at Him as the Saviour offered to them; it does not appropriate Him. It is genuine faith, but unhappily it does not effloresce into hope; and therefore it leaves the heart cold and comfortless. Now, when men are in this condition, looking only at their own impurity and guilt, and thinking only of their own vileness, they cannot serve God with freedom. The psalmist says, 'I will run in the way of Thy commandments when Thou hast enlarged my heart;' but here there is no enlargement—all is contraction and restraint. The soul is enclosed, as it were, within a certain narrow circle, bemoaning its own pollution and helplessness; it is afraid to look upward; it is pressed down by the weight of conscious guilt; and so all the outgoings of love and praise are straitened, and active duty is burdensome. This is 'the soul in prison.' Now we cannot but sympathize with such a case. Yea, we feel constrained to say, that it were well if there were more of this deep humiliation experienced by the professed disciples of Christ than there is. True religion will be found to have struck its roots deepest where it is planted amid the most humbling and painful convictions of personal guilt and unworthiness, and watered with the tears of godly contrition. But, at the same time, believers must not always lie upon their face, and mourn over the deceitfulness and wickedness of their hearts. The Lord demands a service from them, which they cannot render unless they know and can claim Him as the God of redemption, their own God and Father in Christ Jesus. They must bestir themselves, therefore, and look beyond their own sinfulness to the blood which cleanseth from all sin; they must cast their burden upon Him who bore His people's sin upon the tree; and then will they be able freely and joyfully to do Him service. Let them, in faith and earnestness, raise the cry, 'O Lord, bring my soul out of prison;'



and they will be heard and brought out into a large place, and compassed about with songs of deliverance.

Thus we have endeavoured in four particulars to illustrate what is meant by the expression of the soul's being in prison. It is applicable to those who are unconverted, and still under the bondage of sin ; to those who, believing the truth, yet through worldliness and selfishness deprive themselves of the sensible comfort of religion ; to those who have been betrayed into the commission of sins which wound the conscience ; and to those who habitually take a gloomy view of their own spiritual state.

II. And now, having spoken of the prison, we come to speak briefly of some things connected with the deliverance. The psalmist has it in his view as what would be surely granted, when he says in the words which follow the text, 'The righteous shall compass me about, when Thou shalt deal bountifully with me.' And as certainly may all those look for it, who pray in faith that the Lord would bring their soul out of prison. Now the deliverance is achieved by the Lord Jesus Christ. In a passage already quoted, Jehovah is said to have called Him, for this, among other ends, 'To bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison-house.' In another place He is said to have been sent 'to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound.' And by another prophet He is described as 'sending forth the prisoners out of the pit, wherein is no water, by the blood of the covenant.' All these passages present the Redeemer and His work to us under an aspect in keeping with the figure employed in the text, of the soul's being in prison.

Now let it be remarked, that though there is all the difference of death and life between the unconverted man and the believer, and although the soul's imprisonment in the one case is very different from what it is in the other, yet both need equally to apply to Christ ; and the deliverance of both is wrought out in the same way. The unconverted sinner is found lying under the righteous sentence of the law, and his soul is in prison, awaiting there the day of final doom. It is even

so, my friends, terrible though the statement be. Every unconverted person here is shut up under wrath, and the time of execution is not far distant. But we announce these tidings to you, that Christ has been beforehand with the execution of the sentence, in behalf of all who believe, or shall believe, in His name. He has borne it Himself, that they might go free. It cost Him His life; but He gave it willingly, that He might blot out the sentence, and quench the flame of wrath. And Jehovah has said, 'I am satisfied; He hath magnified the law, and made it honourable; and for His righteousness' sake, I am pacified toward them that believe in Him, and accept them as mine own.' This is the divine testimony addressed to you sinners. Do you receive it, and rely upon it? do you cast yourselves all unworthy as you are into the arms of Jesus? Then the prison-door is opened. You can walk forth free, and say, looking up to God, 'O Lord, I will praise Thee; though Thou wast angry with me, Thine anger is turned away, and Thou comfortest me.' But though thus far freedom is wrought out, more yet remains to be done. All the faculties of the soul, and all the affections, have been deranged and perverted by sin; and they must be brought into harmony with the will of God, that the freedom may be perfected, and the deliverance made complete. Accordingly, because now united to Christ, believers are the children of God. He sends forth the Spirit of His Son into their hearts, by whose gracious working the rebellion within is quelled, and the soul from being in a prison is carried into a peaceful sanctuary, where, in the enjoyment of liberty and of Jehovah's smile, it can say with confidence, 'Abba, Father.' Oh, is there not in all this enough to make sinners welcome with joyful hearts the offers of the gospel, and embrace them without delay?

Then, again, to those who through influence of worldliness, or by yielding to the power of besetting sins, have had their souls thrust again into the prison from which they seemed to have been rescued, we have just to commend the same Deliverer, and to make known the same way of obtaining deliverance. You have gone away from the fountain where you had washed, and have contracted new defilement. You

have been stript of your spiritual freedom and strength by forgetting the love of Christ, and slackening your hold of Him. You have been reduced to degrading bondage by grieving the Holy Spirit of God. You must therefore come again in faith to the precious blood, that your conscience may be purged from dead works. You must grasp Christ's hand more firmly, and give Him again your heart, with your *hand*. You must take words, and make them the utterances of faith, and say, 'Cast us not away from Thy presence; and take not Thy Holy Spirit from us. Restore unto us the joy of Thy salvation; and uphold us with Thy free Spirit;' and the Lord will be entreated; He will receive you graciously; He will heal your backslidings; He will loose your bonds; He will fill your hearts with gladness, and the joy of the Lord will be your strength.

And now, as for those who go about in sadness all the day, looking down into the dark depths of their own sinful hearts, let me call upon them to pursue another course. It is well that you be humbled for your sin; but it is not well to spend your whole life in disquietude and sorrow. Your depression of soul will not cure your malady; your tears will not wipe the guilt of one sin away. The Sun of Righteousness is diffusing His light all around; come ye, and walk in the light of the Lord! The chief of sinners are invited to partake of His saving mercy; come and receive your portion. You dishonour Christ, and do indignity to His perfect sacrifice, if you think that your sin is too great to be forgiven, or that peace and joy are privileges too high for you. You have long looked into your hearts and found nothing but corruption there; come and look out now to Christ, and take Him at His word, and you will have peace and freedom too. If you can say no more, say, 'Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief;' and He will reply, 'Be of good cheer, thy sins be forgiven thee.' 'I resist the proud, but give grace unto the humble. I fill the hungry with good things, while I send the rich empty away.' 'Thou art no more a slave, but a son, and an heir of God.' We might say much more here, but we go on.

III. In the third place, we were to advert to the effects of

the deliverance. And here we must be very brief. 'Bring my soul out of prison, *that I may praise Thy name.*' The attainment of liberty is followed by the celebration of God's praise. It is impossible to read the book of Psalms without marking *throughout* the connection that is established between the bestowal of mercies on God's part, and the rendering of praise on the part of the recipients; or we may say, without marking how frequently it is made a plea in prayer for blessings, that if bestowed they would move the heart to praise. We need not quote many examples. The text furnishes one; and here is another (Ps. ix.), 'Have mercy upon me, O Lord; consider my trouble which I suffer of them that hate me, Thou that liftest me up from the gates of death: *that I may show forth all Thy praise in the gates of the daughter of Zion.*'

Let us, however, carry with us here a right conception of what is meant by praising God. It obviously is not to be limited to the mere employment of the language of adoration, for that may be used by any one; and we read, 'This people draweth nigh to me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips, while their heart is far from me.' The praise, then, which is acceptable, is the grateful uplifting of *the heart* to God, in acknowledgment of His loving-kindnesses. But is this all? Is it merely the warm movement of the heart finding an outlet by the lips, that constitutes the praising of God? Evidently not so; there is more implied in the exercise than this. If a gift is bestowed for use, and for *that* especially, will the donor be satisfied, if you send him an acknowledgment that you have received it, while, at the same time, you put it aside, and neglect to use it? Even so in things spiritual, and in God's dealings with His people. He gives grace, but it is that it *may be exercised*; He gives peace, but it is that all being quiet and serene *within*, there may be nothing to interrupt the prosecution of His work *without*; He gives strength, but it is that it may be exerted in the field of spiritual warfare, and in the discharge of Christian duty; He gives freedom and enlargement of soul, but it is that everything which enfeebles the soul, and weighs it down, being removed, it may, unimpeded, pursue its course heavenward,

—as it advances, spreading light and scattering blessings on every side.

The praising of God, then, being not only the devout and heartfelt ascription of thanks to Him as the giver of all good, but the faithful employment of all the blessings He has bestowed, whether temporal or spiritual, for the ends for which He has given them, *i.e.* generally for the advancement of His glory, there is an obvious lesson for those who have experienced the great spiritual deliverance—whose soul has been brought out of prison. The Lord who has visited you graciously, demands of you now the sacrifice of praise. He has a great work to be carried on in this world; and in loosing your bonds, He has just fitted you for taking part in it. In giving yourselves to this work, in speaking a word in season to the weary, in aiding to diffuse the light of the gospel among the ignorant, in contributing, by all the means within your reach, to pluck the perishing as brands from the burning, as well as in building yourselves up in your most holy faith, and aiming in all things at greater conformity to God's law, you praise Him for His grace to you, and give evidence that your soul, once imprisoned, has been brought out into glorious liberty.

But what shall we say to those who are still in bondage? It is written that the dead cannot praise the Lord, and may we not add, neither those who are in the prison. Ah, my friends, how deplorable, how degrading your condition! The whole creation, even the beasts that perish, praise God after their manner; they show forth His glory, and declare His handiwork. You who believe not, you who have gone back into sin, you who are swept along by the tide of worldliness, you only of His creatures cannot praise Him. The words of adoration from an unbelieving heart are mockery. You cannot celebrate His love, for you believe not in the reality of it. You cannot adore His holiness, for you reverence it not. You cannot advance His cause, for ye seek not the grace which alone can strengthen you for it. Oh, friends and brethren, listen to His voice while He summons you from the prison-house; look to the blessed Jesus, who has thrown open the door; stretch out the hand of faith to Him while His hand is

stretched out toward you ; seek His quickening Spirit, and you will be set free. Your soul then, enlarged, will joyfully exclaim, ‘ What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits toward me ? ’ and you will be enrolled in the company of those who do inherit, or who through faith and patience are now advancing to inherit, the promises. Amen.

## XXVI.

### CHRIST'S KINGLY POWER, AS ENTITLING HIM TO WILLING AND GRATEFUL HOMAGE.

‘And on His head were many crowns.’—REV. XIX. 12.

ONE thing which identifies in spirit the Church on earth with the Church of the first-born in heaven, is that Christ is to both the object of highest love, and the theme of unwearied praise and adoration; and one of the invariable marks of all who have been born from above, is the satisfaction which they experience in having their thoughts directed to anything that pertains to His person or His work or His glory. Just as infallibly as you will detect carnality of heart in the habitual outgoing of affection and desire toward that which is of the earth earthy, you will trace spirituality of mind in the habitual movement of the soul toward Christ, in its seeking and finding in Him its chief enjoyment. And just as the regularity and firmness of the pulse indicate the health and vigour of the bodily frame, so the steadiness and strength of love to Christ, which is the pulse of the believing soul, indicate that soul's health and vigour. The subject, then, which has been selected as the theme of our present meditation, will at once commend itself to the attention and sympathy of all in whom the Holy Spirit dwells. Among the other glorious visions that were presented to the mind of John in Patmos, was the one described in the context, in which is portrayed the marriage of the Lamb to the Church, His bride. In vers. 7, 8, you read, ‘Let us be glad and rejoice: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and His wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white; for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.’ These words, as introduced immediately after the downfall of the mystical Babylon, are

generally understood to refer to what will be the glorious and blessed condition of the Church in her communion with Christ, when that great display of the divine judgments shall have been given. And this seems to be the proper interpretation of the passage ; because, in the following verses of the chapter, Christ is represented as going forth to make war upon the remaining enemies of His Church ; all of whom will be overthrown before He comes in the end to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that believe. But still, practically, it is of little moment whether we regard what is spoken of the marriage of the Lamb as having reference to the final glorification of the Church, when she shall be openly acknowledged as His, and admitted to dwell for ever in His presence, the last enemy, which is death, being destroyed ; or to the bright prospects which lie before her on earth, after the downfall of the Papal power. Her eye is in either case directed to Christ her Lord as a conqueror, and a conqueror in her defence and for her benefit. It is in this character that He is presented to us in vers. 11, 12 : ‘ And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse ; and He that sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He doth judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns : and He had a name written, that no man knew, but He Himself.’ The power and majesty with which Christ meets and overcomes the opposition of His enemies are symbolized by the white horse ; His omniscience, manifested in His counteracting and defeating all their schemes, is signified by the words, ‘ His eyes were as a flame of fire ;’ the extent of His kingdom, and the number and greatness of His conquests, are denoted by His having on His head many crowns ; and when it is said that ‘ He had a name written, that no man knew, but He Himself,’ allusion seems to be made to His incommunicable and infinite perfections as the eternal Son of God. But there are other names by which He is known to the Church, for her comfort and encouragement, and to the world, as will appear in the end, to its confusion and dismay. Thus, in ver. 13, you read, ‘ His name is called the Word of God ;’ and in ver. 16, ‘ He hath on His vesture and on His thigh a name written, King of kings, and Lord of



lords.' The latter of these titles harmonizes with the statement contained in the words which have been selected as the text: 'Christ is King of kings, and Lord of lords; and on His head are many crowns.' The crown is an emblem of sovereignty; it was also in ancient times an emblem of victory, the victor being decorated with a crown, especially if his conquest was of importance. Now, it may be said of Christ that He wears the crown as *sovereign Lord of all*; and that He wears besides many crowns, the rewards and fruits of His conquests, in virtue of which He is entitled to the grateful homage of His people. Raise your thoughts for a moment, my friends, to the vision which met the eye of the apostle, when he saw the heaven opened, and Christ the conqueror issuing forth, for His great and final triumph, at the head of heaven's countless hosts. On His head He has many crowns! I see the one which He wears as invested with universal sovereignty, 'King of kings, and Lord of lords.' I see another, which He has acquired as King of Zion, Head over all things to His Church. I see another, which He gained on Calvary, when, having achieved the redemption of the Church by the sacrifice of Himself, He raised the cry of victory, 'It is finished.' I see another won on the resurrection morning, when He came up from the grave the conqueror of death and hell. I see another studded with sparkling gems innumerable, each small, but in combination forming one brilliant orb of light, that seems to add to the lustre of all the other crowns. It marks the victories of His faithful followers over the world and sin and Satan; and He wears it because their victories are the trophies of His power and of His grace. I see another still, with which it well becometh Him to be adorned. We read that the crown which the generals of imperial Rome most highly prized was that which was conferred upon them by any portion of the army they had delivered from being blockaded by the enemy. It was made by the soldiers of the humblest materials, and was of no intrinsic worth, but it was precious as a token of affection. Now, such a crown Christ wears in the adoring gratitude of His people, whom He hath ransomed with His blood. Their praises in themselves are worthless, but in His sight they are of inestimable price, as

they tell that He reigneth in their hearts. But strange to see, amid all these shining diadems which encircle the Saviour's brow, there is one which at the first appears to be scarce in keeping with the rest. It looks like a crown of thorns, and seems as if it had been put there in mockery. And so it was; but it marks a glorious victory—the triumph of the human soul of Jesus over ignominy and reproach and insult, which no other spirit than His own would have endured, when one look could have struck His rude tormentors dead; but which He endured without a murmur, because they were ingredients in the cup which the Father had given Him to drink. Ah! it is that crown of thorns that will make those who despise and reject Him tremble most when He appears in all His glory. Every eye will see Him, and they will remember how they mocked and made light of Him who is now revealed as King of kings and Lord of lords; they will quail before Him, and seek in vain to be hidden from His sight. But the redeemed will then lift up their heads and rejoice. It is He whom they have looked and longed for that wears these shining crowns, emblems of power and majesty and grace; and joyfully will they raise the song of triumph, ‘Salvation and glory and blessing to the Lamb that was slain. Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.’

The general subject, then, my friends, which we have at present to consider is Christ's kingly power, as entitling Him to receive our willing and grateful homage. This is a subject of vast extent, as may appear from the many crowns with which He is adorned; and it would be vain for us to attempt even to give a sketch of all that might be advanced upon a theme so wide and full of interest. Out of the various topics which are suggested by the text, I would select the following. In the first place, I would direct your attention to the kingly dignity and power with which Christ is invested, with special relation to the salvation of His Church; in the second place, I would consider on what grounds He holds this power over the visible Church, as its Head and King; and in the third place, what is the homage which He requires of His subjects. May the Spirit of life and light guide our meditations and render them profitable!

I. In the first place, then, I would direct your attention to the kingly dignity and power with which Christ is invested, with special relation to the salvation of His Church. Dominion over all things belongs to Him, as God the Creator of all things visible and invisible, and as upholding all things by the word of His power. It is in this respect, as I have said, that He wears the crown of *universal sovereignty*. But on this topic we do not enlarge. It is to Christ as wearing the *mediatorial crown* that I have at present to direct your thoughts; and it is this view of His royal dignity that His believing people feel to be the most attractive. It is not necessary to quote many passages to show that in the Scripture He is represented as the Church's King, and in that capacity as clothed with all power and authority. 'All things are put under His feet;' and, 'To Him every knee must bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and every tongue must confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.' The *mediatorial* kingdom of Christ, in the full sense of the term, comprehends the whole range of creation; but His power is especially exerted in behalf of His Church, and in making all things minister to her well-being and advancement. We restrict our remarks at present to the Church in her earthly state, where she has to struggle against the many enemies that seek her destruction, and where she could not maintain her place were she not constantly defended and upheld by the might of her heavenly Lord. This world, which is the arena on which the power of Christ is peculiarly displayed, and where His triumphs as a conqueror are won, is in rebellion against Him. The Church, which is composed of all those, and of those only, who have been born of the Spirit, who believe in Christ, who submit to His law, and who are more or less conformed to His image, may be likened to a very small province, in which loyalty is maintained, in the midst of the disaffection and insubordination which prevail all around. The King sends forth His ambassadors to summon the rebels to surrender, offering them a free pardon if they will accept His terms; but the great mass of them cry out, 'We will not have this man to reign over us;' and they are confirmed in their opposition to Him by various influences.

Their own hearts suggest the argument, that to yield to His authority, would be to cast away all real enjoyment. One encourages another in his determination to resist. And there is, besides, the subtle and malignant influence of the powers of darkness, which is ever put forth to confirm sinners in their resistance to the claims of Christ. So completely indeed is this world so under the power of Satan, that it is called his kingdom, and he is even called the god of it; and so firmly riveted are the chains in which he keeps his miserable subjects, that, as we may say, it is only *one by one* that any are drawn out of that kingdom of darkness into the glorious kingdom of our Lord and Saviour. No doubt, if the application of external ordinances constituted men the subjects of the kingdom of grace, it would not be difficult to swell their ranks. But the empire of the Redeemer reaches beyond the body, to the heart and soul and conscience; and it is only when these are brought into subjection that He reigns as King. Now, it is here that we perceive the real glory and moral greatness of His dominion, the real lustre of His kingly crown. And on this point we would dwell for a little, as it deserves attention. In Satan's empire there is discernible a thorough submission to his terrible will, on the part of all who own his sway. Even when under the power of an awakened conscience, or moved by the earnest persuasives of those who desire to emancipate them from his yoke, they seem for a season to be sensible of their degradation and their misery; still, if no higher appliances than these are brought to bear upon them, they soon sink back into their former bondage. So that, on a hasty glance, you might imagine that in Satan's dark domain there is as real an authority exercised over heart and soul as there can be in Christ's kingdom of light. All the tendencies of the natural man, all the dispositions and affections and movements both of heart and mind, are on the side of the prince of darkness. Satan only keeps his own when he maintains his supremacy over them; whereas the dominion of Christ is *acquired*, in opposition to the tendencies of the natural man, and against force and influence which omnipotence alone can overcome. His dominion is that of one who is invested with *creative* power, who can make the

will of man subject to Him, in opposition to its natural bias, and yet without forcing it; who can softly and without constraint lead the affections to loathe what they loved before, and to entwine themselves around objects from which formerly they would have shrunk; in a word, who can take away the hard and stony heart, and give instead of it a heart of flesh.

Now this forms the real illustration of Christ's kingly authority. It is a noble and elevating spectacle to behold the triumph of *mind* over *matter*; to see how the most unwieldy masses can be moved, brought into shape, and turned to useful purposes by human skill and genius; and how the secret agencies of nature can be made tributary to the wants and conveniences of man. But the triumph of *mind* over *mind* is unspeakably higher. It is in this, indeed, that we get the best and most comprehensive idea of what is meant by *power*, as contrasted with mere *strength*. Bring together a few thousand men, and let them put forth their strength under proper guidance, for the accomplishment of some great public work, and in a short space you will see changes made upon the face of a whole district, and results produced for the comfort of the community, which you would have scarcely ventured to anticipate. This shows what vast effects human intellect and bodily *strength* combined can work out. But it does not convey to us anything like the idea of tremendous *power* which is impressed upon us, for example, when we read the history of the Popish order of the Jesuits: how a vast body of men, of the most diverse tempers, and many of them of high intellectual endowments, are so thoroughly under the control of one man, that they may be almost literally said to have neither body nor mind, heart nor conscience, of their own, but are moved, as if they were mere passive instruments, at the will and bidding of another. There is no argument employed to sway their movements; the bare *will* of the superior lays all prostrate before it. The whole system, indeed, illustrates most forcibly the nature of Satan's government, of which it forms one of the chief departments. And, what we have especially to notice upon this—it furnishes us with an actual and living specimen of the difference between the power of Satan's agencies and the power of Christ's truth. In the former case, while the whole

heart and mind of the man are kept in complete subjection, it is by ministering to all his corrupt tendencies. In the latter, the corrupt tendencies are subdued and mortified, and the subjection wrought is from rebellion against God to cheerful acquiescence in His authority; from the love of sin and the serving of impure desires and appetites, to the love of holiness and obedience to the law of righteousness. Yes, my friends, it is Christ the King who truly wields the power, when He can transform the heart, which naturally is desperately wicked, a fountain of impurity, into a sanctuary for Himself to dwell in, a fountain whence flow the streams of holy thought and action. We see omnipotence exerted by Christ, when at His word the raging billows are hushed, and there is a great calm. But, if we may so speak, there is a more wondrous display of omnipotence put forth, when from the man who a moment before was breathing out fierce enmity against Jesus of Nazareth, you hear the submissive cry, 'Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?' This is kingly *power* in its highest and most glorious exercise; power controlling the determined will of as resolute *a man as ever lived*, and yet leaving that will perfectly and absolutely free. Then, my friends, have you experienced aught like this transformation? Has the grace of Christ melted and subdued your hearts, so that you can now say, 'Lord, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I love Thee'? Has the authority of the divine law become paramount in your esteem, so that it is, as it were, written in your very heart and mind, forming the great directory of all your conduct? Has the reigning influence of selfishness been broken down in you, and the grand ruling motive of desire to serve and honour Christ been substituted in its stead? Have your tastes, your aims, and your enjoyments been purified from that earthliness by which they were all stained, and assimilated to Christ's, whose meat and drink it was to do the will of His heavenly Father? And do you feel yourselves set free from the rule of grovelling desires and lusts, and enabled to pursue the things which are true and pure and lovely and of good report? Then are ye the monuments of Christ's kingly power; then are ye living witnesses to testify that He wears the crown, as reigning over the hill of Zion.

But while we see the proof of His resistless authority in His *converting rebels into willing subjects*, we perceive further, with what delight His subjects may own Him as their King, from the benefits which they enjoy under His gracious sway. *Power* stands forth in its most attractive attitude, when it appears with outstretched arm conferring blessings. The time will not permit us to enumerate all the blessings which Christ bestows on those whom He has made His willing people, but one or two may be specified.

1. He secures for them a place in His Father's *favour*. As rebels, they were estranged and afar off from God; but Christ brings them nigh, and presents them as His own, whom He has rescued out of the hand of the destroyer. The Father smiles upon them, well pleased with them for His Son's righteousness' sake, and permits them to have free access to Him as His children. All their transgressions are forgiven, and they are dealt with as if they had never sinned. In strict speech, it is in the exercise of His *priestly* office, as having made atonement for their sin, that Christ has acquired for them pardon and acceptance with God; for we read, 'You, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath He reconciled in the body of His flesh through death.' But then it is as a King that He puts them actually in possession of His purchased blessings. It is by sending the rod of His strength out of Zion that He makes them a willing people in His day of power; and it is as having been raised to the Headship over them that He says in the presence of the Father, 'Behold, I and the children Thou hast given me.'

2. Secondly, Christ as a King imparts to His people *peace*. 'His name is called the Prince of Peace.' 'Of the increase of His government and peace there shall be no end.' 'The kingdom of God is righteousness and peace.' When you trace the history of the Church, through all its stages to the present time, you seem at first to be introduced rather into a scene of strife and trouble and warfare than into the quiet and undisturbed domain of Him in whose days it is said 'the righteous shall flourish, and abundance of peace so long as the moon endureth.' The Church is indeed like one small province

which maintains its allegiance to the sovereign in the midst of a disaffected and rebellious empire. And as surrounded by enemies, its external condition has always been more or less one of trial. Too often, also, have there been dissensions within, weakening its strength, and giving the enemy great advantage over it. But with all this, it is pre-eminently true that Christ giveth His people peace. They have peace with God. The great controversy has been settled between Him and them, through the sacrifice offered on Calvary. He is no longer to them as a consuming fire; they can look up to Him with hope and confidence as their friend and Father. And not only so, but, by the power of Christ's grace, the tempest of unruly passion that formerly raged in their bosoms is subdued and stilled; and where wild and ungovernable appetites, like noxious weeds, were nurtured before, there are yielded the Spirit's holy and blessed fruits of love and joy, and gentleness and meekness and charity. *Peace* assuredly does reign in the heart of the believer; and it is Christ's kingly gift to him, as He says Himself, 'Peace I give unto you, my peace I leave with you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.'

3. Thirdly, Christ as a King imparts *holiness* to His people. In connection with the sending of the rod of His strength out of Zion, whereby He gathers round Him a willing people, we read that this people shall be clothed with the beauty of holiness. And it is the same truth that is expressed in another form, when we are told that Christ, as exalted to the right hand of God, that is, as the King of the Church, sends forth the Holy Spirit, by whose indwelling and agency light is poured into the darkened mind, love is shed abroad in the heart, and the divine likeness is impressed upon the soul that was formerly all defiled and debased by sin. This, next to the full fruition of Himself, is the highest gift that Christ confers upon His people out of His royal bounty. This is a fountain of blessedness opened up within themselves, which never can be exhausted. This is what our Lord calls 'a well of water in them springing up unto everlasting life.'

And now, my friends, survey these few results of Christ's



mediatorial reign to which we have referred ; contrast the condition of the rebel sinner under Satan's bondage with the condition of those who have been subdued by omnipotent grace ; behold a people translated from darkness to light, made willing to serve the Holy One, yea, rejoicing in His service, raised to the favour of God, and to the enjoyment of peace and purity ; and say if those who are so blessed can refrain from hailing with rapture Him from whom the blessings come, in virtue of His wearing the mediatorial crown ; say if the children of Zion have not abundant reason to be joyful in their King.

II. But we must now proceed, in the second place, to consider briefly on what grounds Christ holds His dignity and power as King of the Church.

1. And, in the first place, it is to be observed that He holds it by the *delegation* or *gift* of the Father. This truth is very fully set forth in the Scriptures, both in the Old Testament and in the New. Thus Jehovah, addressing the Redeemer, says, '*I have set my King upon my holy hill of Zion. Thou art my Son ; this day have I begotten Thee. Ask of me, and I shall give Thee the heathen for Thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for Thy possession.*' And again, '*Jehovah said unto my Lord, Sit Thou at my right hand, until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool : rule Thou in the midst of Thine enemies.*' And once more, you read that God the Father of glory 'hath set Christ at His own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come : and hath put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be Head over all things to the Church.' From these passages it is very obvious that the mediatorial kingdom is administered by Christ in virtue of the Father's gift. We are not to suppose, however, that it was only after His resurrection from the dead, and His ascension into heaven, that Christ was advanced to the royal dignity. For it was by the efficacy of *His* grace that sinners were called out of the world into the Church from the beginning ; and it was by Him that all the affairs of the Old Testament Church were regulated, when He bore the title of

Jehovah, the Angel of the Covenant. But because His kingly glory was not fully manifested until after His resurrection, and because it was conferred upon Him as the reward of His humiliation and obedience unto death, therefore it is that it is referred to as peculiarly commencing when He triumphed over the grave. The divine purpose of mercy toward the elect, which was embodied in the covenant of grace, was revealed and began to be executed immediately after the Fall, the Mediator of the covenant being empowered to carry it into effect, in virtue of the great work which He was to accomplish in the fulness of the times. The Father gave into His hand all those who were to be raised to glory; as we read, 'Thine they were, and Thou gavest them me;' and from the first 'He had power over all flesh, to give eternal life to as many as the Father had given Him.' So that there was no new power or authority bestowed upon Him when, as God-Man, He ascended up on high. The crown was only then, as it were, put *visibly* upon His head; the glory which had before belonged to Him was only then openly displayed.

And now, constituted the Church's King, and swaying the sceptre of sovereignty by the Father's appointment, He will reign until He hath put all enemies under His feet. Then, when all His people are gathered in, and the ends of the mediatorial dispensation are answered; when the whole family of God—angels who have never sinned, and the redeemed from among the children of men—are brought together in one blessed company under Christ the one Head; when there is no further need of subduing and strengthening and defending grace, the kingdom will be delivered up to God, even the Father, that He may be all in all.

2. But, in the second place, Christ holds His kingly dignity and power on the ground of self-sacrifice; or, in other words, He has acquired it by *purchase*. The expression is of frequent occurrence in the Scripture: 'He gave Himself for us;' 'He gave Himself for the Church;' 'He gave Himself a ransom for many.' These are expressions of vast significance, though we often read them without marking their import. No absolute act of sovereign mercy could of itself bring pardon and life to the guilty who had forfeited their life. And though Christ

received power over all flesh, to give eternal life to as many as the Father had given Him, yet the transference of the sovereignty to Him could not of itself ameliorate the condition of sinful men : because these two barriers stood in the way—inflexible justice, which could not let go its hold of sinners without an adequate satisfaction ; and a sentence of condemnation, which had been pronounced by God's unalterable law. Hence arose the necessity of a ransom that might satisfy justice, and abolish the sentence of the law, without compromising its authority. The sceptre of Christ's kingdom was to be a sceptre of righteousness ; justice and judgment were to be the stability of His throne ; and therefore He must take possession of His kingly office by fulfilling all righteousness, and by upholding all the claims of justice and judgment. And this He did by giving *Himself* for His people, that He might have the right to reign over them, and to exercise His power to save them. We see, then, in what estimation He held them, when He thus put Himself in their stead, and voluntarily submitted to have all the demands of law and justice charged against Himself, and exacted from Himself, that He might become the author of eternal life to all who should believe upon His name. He did not go forward in the majesty of royal power, and tear down the sentence of condemnation which was written against them. This might not be, because that sentence was in accordance with the principles of eternal justice, by which the universe is governed ; and to have forcibly torn it down, so that, in defiance of it, the guilty might go free, would have been to throw the universe into disorder. But He humbled Himself, and was found in fashion as a man ; and thus, in the very nature of those against whom the terrible sentence of condemnation stood, He put Himself into the hand of that justice which is the guardian of the law's integrity, and bound Himself, as His people's surety, to render to it all that it could demand, even to the uttermost. Justice had a twofold demand to make, viz. a perfect fulfilment of every precept of the law, and the complete payment of its penalty of death. And He gave both ; He obeyed and died. And let it be specially observed, His life was not taken from Him against His will. Had it been so, it would not have been a sacrifice for sin.

But He says Himself, 'I lay down my life that I may take it again; no man taketh it from me, but I lay it down of myself: I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again.' Blessed words, on which the whole certainty of our salvation rests. Here was what might satisfy the law as its full penalty, and what at the same time it could not exact from Him without His free consent. What it could not *exact*, as having any natural authority over Him, He gave freely, as the Church's surety; and thus He was empowered to nail to His cross the sentence that was written against her, in testimony that He had stript the law of its power to condemn any one of those whom the Father had given Him. Ah, my friends, when you look at Christ, and see Him crowned as the Church's King, forget not that He wears the dignity at the cost of His own life. The cross, indeed, was converted into a throne, and the crown of thorns into a royal diadem; but who can estimate at what a sacrifice? The bodily torture, the mockery, the ignominy, are scarcely to be noticed, in comparison with that awful darkness which brooded over the soul of the Holy Sufferer, when the Father hid His face from Him. The stream of life in Him did not gradually ebb till consciousness was gone, and then one long-drawn breath told that the struggle was at an end. But with full consciousness of the dreadful agony, even to the last, and with one mighty effort, He Himself gave up His Spirit, satisfying the extremest claim of justice; and thus purchased His right to the mediatorial crown.

3. In the third place, Christ holds His kingly dignity and power on the ground of conquest. We need not make allusion to His victory over death, as that would lead us into a train of remark similar to that which has just been pursued. We shall at present refer only to His triumph over Satan, who had the power of death. By their apostasy from God, men became the prey of the destroyer. They were shut up, as it were, under sentence of death, and he was their jailor. By his craft and subtlety he could take advantage of all their natural corruptions, and, by working at one time upon their hopes and desires, and at another time upon their fears, he was able to hold them in the most abject slavery. All the

superstitions of the heathen world were, and are, his devices for keeping his wretched subjects in bondage ; and all the corruptions of true religion are also to be traced to his influence. He had also, in former times at least, as we learn from the Scripture, a certain power over the bodies of men, to trouble and torment them. And especially about the time of our Lord's appearing, this power seems to have been enlarged, as if for the purpose of affording the more complete demonstration that the seed of the woman should bruise the head of the serpent. Now it was peculiarly against this malignant enemy of the human race that Christ entered the lists as a combatant. ' For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.' Their first conflict was in the wilderness. There, by the three great arguments which he wields with such force against men, Satan assailed the Saviour, attempting to bring Him under his power, through the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life. But he was foiled at every point. He came to the Holy One, but he found nothing in Him ; and the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, drove him away discomfited. Other evidences of Christ's being stronger than the strong man were repeatedly given during His ministry, in His casting out devils, and making them acknowledge their submission to His authority. But the last and great conflict between our Lord and His adversary was fought in Gethsemane and on Calvary. Had there been wrung from the Redeemer but one murmur amid His agony, had there been excited in Him but one thought or wish in opposition to the Father's will, the work of redemption had been frustrated ! And oh, what desperate effort was put forth to crush the soul of the Man Christ Jesus, and make Him resile from His enterprise, that bloody sweat in the garden abundantly reveals. But the effort was vain. No murmuring, no rebellion could be stirred up in that spotless soul. The words which show how terrible the struggle was, show also how complete the triumph : ' Abba, Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me : nevertheless, not my will, but Thine, be done.' And so also on Calvary, with intensest pain poured in upon His spirit, with the prince of darkness shooting against Him all his deadliest darts, and, more agoniz-

ing still, with heaven all dark above Him, the Saviour conquered; and when He bowed His head and gave up the ghost, He not only blotted out the handwriting of ordinances that was against His people, but also 'spoiled principalities and powers, and made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in His cross.' And now the authority of Satan is broken. When Christ sends forth His all-powerful Word, accompanied by the Spirit's grace, the enslaved soul is set free; and there is not a temptation, however strong, which the believer in Christ may not resist and overcome, if he will only cast himself in faith upon the strength of his heavenly King. Again, therefore, we say, look to Him who, by the appointment of the Father, by the sacrifice of Himself, and by His victory over Satan, has acquired the power of rescuing you from the destroyer, and securing for you pardon and peace, and restoration to God's likeness, and eternal life; and say if He deserves not to be honoured as the King of Zion, and to receive the undivided homage of your hearts, and your song of praise, 'Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive the kingdom, and the power, and the glory.'

III. But we come now, in the third place, to consider for a few moments how Christ exercises His power and dignity as King of the Church.

Under this head much might be said, but we shall restrict our remarks to these two points, viz. that He defends His people from danger, and provides for their advancement in the divine life, until they are prepared for final glorification with Himself.

1. He defends His people from danger. As has been already stated, all the resources of the universe are at His disposal, and all created power must bow to Him. This supreme control He holds for the special benefit of those who believe in Him, so that all things are made to work together for their good. We cannot, indeed, in every case, trace out the connection between the movements of His providence and the advancement of their interests. So short-sighted are we, that we sometimes regard as calamities and evils, events which His wisdom renders subservient ultimately to our comfort and our

highest good. But the Scripture in very many places assures us that He watches over His own, that His eye is ever upon them, that all that concerns them is interesting to Him, and that nothing can befall them without His sovereign permission. More particularly, we are informed that Satan's power with respect to them is completely changed. 'I beheld him fall as lightning from heaven,' said Christ; 'and behold I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy.' So that when Christ's people are drawn away by the wicked one, it is not because he possesses any resistless influence over them, but because they are not on the watch against his devices, and are not careful to implore in their behalf the promised assistance of their King. Altogether, then, although the world is to believers as a battlefield in which they have to fight their way at every point against adverse influences, both from within and from without, yet they are engaged in no doubtful warfare. Their final triumph is as certain as it is certain that their great Leader has already triumphed. He Himself places the fact upon this ground, for their encouragement, when He says, 'In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.' 'Because I live, ye shall live also.' It would be good for weak faith often to take its place beside the prophet Elisha and his servant, when they were compassed about by the army of the king of Syria that had been sent to apprehend the prophet. The young man in alarm cried out, 'Alas, my master! How shall we do? And he answered, Fear not: for they that be with *us* are more than they that be with *them*. And Elisha prayed and said, Lord, I pray Thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.' And so, if faith were only in lively exercise, the soul would not be disquieted and alarmed, even under the most pressing difficulties; for He who is the Church's Almighty King, whose name is Faithful and True, hath said, 'Fear not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God.' Oh, my friends, when we think of our own weakness and insufficiency, and call to mind the numberless occasions when we foolishly exposed ourselves to tempta-

tions, by which, if left to ourselves, we must have been overcome and ruined for ever; and when we consider all the way by which the Lord hath led us hitherto, marked by the forbearance and care and tenderness of the kindest of parents toward wayward children, and remember that He who has so tended and guided and protected us is none other than the King on whose laws we have so often trampled, and whose Word we have so often called in question by our unbelief, we cannot but acknowledge that, among the many brilliant gems that sparkle in His many crowns, there shine, with brightest as with sweetest radiance, mercy, and grace, and love.

2. But, secondly, Christ provides for the advancement of His people in the life of faith, until they are prepared for final glorification with Himself. While the whole scheme of providence, as one department of His administration, is conducted with a view to the protection and real advantage of those who are truly the subjects of His kingdom; so the whole economy of grace, as another department of it, is conducted with a view to their purification from sin, and attainment of meetness for the heavenly glory. What a marvellous and beautiful accommodation there is of the divine agency for the accomplishment of this grand result! what an accumulation of miracles of grace, we may well say, in the history of every individual believer! Just select one particular case, and mark the process and the appliances by which the sinner is raised from earth to heaven. You know what is true of the natural condition of that sinner. He lies under the wrath and the malediction of Jehovah; so says the Scripture, 'All by nature are children of wrath.' He is all defiled and covered over with the leprosy of sin; for says the Scripture, 'Every imagination of the thoughts of man's heart is evil continually.' He is under the power of Satan; for says the Scripture, 'He walks according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience.' He is utterly helpless and incapable of delivering himself from the wretchedness in which he grovels; for the Scripture likens him to the infant forsaken by its mother, and cast out into the open field to perish. Then mark the grace of Zion's King. He takes



up this helpless sinner, and spreads His own skirt over him, so that the wrath and curse which were suspended above his head can no longer reach him. He washes him with water, and anoints him with oil; as the prophet says, cleansing him from his impurity, and healing the diseases of his soul. He strikes off his fetters, and brings him out into a glorious liberty, so that he can love God, and obey His law, and honour Him by submitting to His will. And then, as the soul still needs more heavenly light, He imparts it every day by His Word and Spirit; as the heart waxes faint under trials and discouragements, He spreads out His promises to strengthen it, and by His Spirit also breathes into it courage; as faith sometimes becomes weak, He lays before it the seals of the covenant, and gives it views of the coming glory that enables it to soar upward as on eagle's wings; when corruption would break forth, He makes His providence a rod to beat it down; and when love becomes cold, He sends His Spirit to fan the sacred flame, until, all His gracious purposes being at length completed, He comes at length and whispers in the believer's ear, 'Arise, depart, this is not your rest: come with me; I have appointed you a kingdom, even as my Father hath appointed me.' Oh, my friends, if this blessed work, which is to be so triumphantly terminated, has been begun in you, even *now*, in the midst of this world's cares and troubles, your heart may be lifted up in anticipation of the glory of which Isaiah speaks, when he says, 'He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces: and it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him: this is the Lord; we have waited for Him, we will be glad and rejoice in His salvation.'

IV. And now for a few moments, in the fourth place, and in the way of application, let us advert to the homage which Christ the King of Zion requires of His subjects. Here I can only mention one or two particulars, without enlarging.

1. In the first place, He requires the homage of the heart. And it must be given fully and without reserve. Let us never forget that He on whose head are many crowns has eyes as a flame of fire. He sees into the inmost recesses of our bosom,

into the most secret movements of our mind. And if we offer Him a mock homage, our place will be among the hypocrites whom He will consume with the brightness of His coming.

2. In the second place, He requires His subjects to reverence and obey His law. As the expression of His sovereign will, it should command their highest respect and their cheerful acquiescence. It is in itself holy and just and good; and compliance with it is the sure pathway to real enjoyment. As containing the very embodiment of love, it forms the rule by which the hosts of heaven are governed, and to which they are all conformed; so that obedience to it brings your life into harmony with theirs, and makes you even here on earth, in a certain measure, partakers of their blessedness. But over and above all this, it comes to you invested with a charm which cannot but commend it to your regard and your affection. It is that law from whose curse the King bought you off with His own blood. He brings it to you, not with the severe and stern aspect of a powerful taskmaster, saying, 'Obey, or die,' but with the mild and gracious countenance of a friend and benefactor, saying, 'I gave myself for you; if ye love me, keep my commandments.' And is not your reply, 'Lord, write them in our heart, that we may keep them, and thus testify our love to Thee'?

3. In the third place, He requires His subjects to trust Him implicitly, and place unlimited confidence in His power. To distrust Him, is to dishonour Him; and to look for help to any other, is to question His ability to save. He will have you pour all your secrets into His ear, unfold to Him all your perplexities and griefs, and lean upon His very bosom, that all your wants may be supplied, and all your sorrows alleviated; that His strength may be made your strength, and His grace your constant stay. And surely it should need no argument to secure your submission to this requirement.

4. Once more, fourthly, He requires His subjects to take an interest in the affairs and extend the boundaries of His kingdom. The glory of a sovereign consists, at least partly, in the number and devotedness of those who own his sway. If, by your prayers, your efforts, your labours, any have been brought to submit to Him who before were aliens, Christ

is glorified by you. And oh, my friends, would it not be a blessed thing, if, when He appears in His glory, there should be among the countless multitudes that swell His train, some one or more whom we have been the honoured instruments of drawing into His kingdom, and making participants of His joy. And now, stand still, O my soul, and contemplate the scene which will that day be revealed. There He comes forth who wears the many crowns, the King, the Conqueror, surrounded by the trophies of His power and of His grace. Wilt thou be there to join in the triumphant song that hails His advent, and to be owned by Him as the fruit of the travail of His soul? Only if on earth thou hast been washed in His blood, and sealed with His Spirit, and conformed to His image; for holiness is inscribed on all His crowns, and in His presence there can dwell nothing that defileth. Amen.

## XXVII.

### THE SIN AND DANGER OF REJECTING CHRIST.

‘He that despised Moses’ law died without mercy under two or three witnesses : of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God ?’—HEB. x. 28, 29.

THE chief design of this epistle was to show the excellency of the Christian above the Mosaic dispensation, by first contrasting the heads of the two dispensations, Christ and Moses ; and then by showing, at great length, how the Old Testament economy, with its priesthood, its sacrifices, and its various imposing ceremonies, served only to shadow forth or typify the spiritual realities which were to be unfolded under the new. The obvious conclusion, then, to be drawn from all this was, that higher reverence was due to everything connected with Christianity than with Judaism. ‘God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake unto the fathers in time past by the *prophets*, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His *Son*.’ ‘Moses verily was faithful as a *servant* in all God’s house, but *Christ* as a *Son* over His own house.’ ‘These priests under the law were many, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death ; but Christ, because He continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood.’ ‘The blood of bulls and of goats, and ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, could only cleanse to the purifying of the flesh ; but the blood of Christ purgeth the conscience from dead works to serve the living God.’ ‘Ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and to blackness, and darkness, and tempest : but ye are come unto Mount Zion, and to the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, and to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant.’ Such, then, being the transcendent superiority of the New

Testament dispensation, it is but natural that the apostle should in many places enlarge upon the aggravated guilt of those who made light of it, and rejected the privileges which it brings. We have various passages similar to the text in this epistle. Thus, 'How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord?' 'If they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth,' *i.e.* *Moses*, 'much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from Him that speaketh from heaven,' *i.e.* *Christ*. And in the text, 'He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses: of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God?' Under the law of Moses, 'every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense of reward.' And those crimes which were accounted most heinous, as murder, adultery, and idolatry, were to be punished without mercy; but especially murder and idolatry. 'The murderer shall die,' it is said; 'thine eye shall not pity him, but thou shalt put away the guilt of innocent blood from Israel.' And with regard to the idolater, it is written, 'If thy brother or thy son entice thee secretly, saying, Let us go and serve other gods; namely, of the gods of the people which are round about thee, then thou shalt not consent unto him; neither shall thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him: but thou shalt surely kill him; thine hand shall be first upon him to put him to death, and afterwards the hand of all the people.' Then, argues the apostle, if the authority of the law of Moses was upheld and enforced by such awful and immutable penalties, what mitigation can be looked for of the punishment of those who despise the gospel, and tread under foot the Son of God? what language can describe the doom which they merit, and which they shall assuredly suffer? The general doctrine, then, which the text presents for illustration, is the fearful sin and danger of despising and rejecting Christ. And in directing your attention to this subject, I would endeavour, in the first place, to show who they are that are chargeable with the sin of despising and rejecting Him, or, as it is in the text, of treading Him under foot; then, in the second place, I would advert to

the heinous nature of this sin; and, in the third place, to the terrible consequences of it.

I. In the first place, let us endeavour to ascertain who they are that are chargeable with the sin of despising and rejecting Christ, or, as it is in the text, of treading Him under foot.

Now, here our thoughts naturally turn first to the Jewish people, who, when Christ came to them as to His own, received Him not; and to their rulers, who not only themselves treated Him with indignity and cruelty, but stirred up the multitude to cry, 'Away with Him; crucify Him, crucify Him.' He appeared among them, claiming their homage, as the Messiah promised to the fathers and pointed to by the prophets; He expounded to them the will of God so fully, and with such authority, as to constrain many to say, 'Never man spake like this man;' He wrought miracles which proved that He was invested with a divine commission; He went about continually doing good. But His heavenly doctrines only excited the enmity of the chief priests and rulers; His miracles, instead of convincing them that He was from God, only made them the more furious against Him; and His deeds of beneficence filled them at once with envy and wrath. And so, when Pilate formally left it in their option whether he should extend his mercy toward Jesus or toward the robber and murderer Barabbas, they publicly and formally chose Barabbas, and rejected Jesus, demanding that He should be crucified. They plainly trampled under foot the Son of God. Now we shudder at their infatuation and their guilt, and we are ready to say, 'If we had lived in those days, we would not have been partakers with them in shedding the innocent blood.' Is it so, my friends? Let us not be too hasty and confident in our judgments; for, as we shall see, it may be that some of ourselves are virtually stained with the crime of these bitter and determined enemies of the Lord. It will be admitted at once by every one now hearing me, that this crime may be laid to the charge of all who openly scoff at the doctrines of the gospel, who denounce its holy requirements as an interference with human liberty, and who laugh

at what is written of Christ as a fable altogether unworthy of credit. The avowed infidel, the blasphemer, and the debased sensualist, who treat the religion of Christ with contempt and make a mock of everything sacred, because their vices are condemned by the divine Word and threatened with punishment, must certainly be classed among the despisers who trample Christ under foot; for as they deal with His truth, they would deal with Himself if they could.

But we must not stop at this point. Among those who bear the Christian name, there are too many who fall under the condemnation which is pronounced in the text. Even in the apostolic age there were some who called themselves disciples, of whom the Apostle Paul thus speaks, 'Many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is destruction, whose god is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.' The Lord Jesus, it must be remembered, came not only to make atonement for sin, but *to put away sin* by the sacrifice of Himself. 'For this end was the Son of God manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.' He is to be regarded, then, as standing between His followers and every sinful desire and appetite; as stretching out His arm to keep them from entering into the paths into which their crafty adversary would entice them; and ever saying to them, in accents of tenderness mingled with authority, 'O do not that abominable thing which I hate.' And when they, with the words, 'Lord, Lord,' upon their lips, will gratify their desires at all hazards, and suffer themselves to be led captive by Satan, and dragged into the mire of his pollutions, do they not, as it were, thrust Christ's arm aside, that they may pass over to His enemies? Yea, may they not be said to trample Himself under foot, that they may serve their own unholy lusts and passions? Surely if anything dishonours Him, this does: that men who profess to believe His Word and reverence His authority, should be found, at the bidding of the world, or in the pursuit of what they call pleasure, or through the influence of the tempter—or, in a word, whenever Christ's will crosses theirs, should be found to cast His Word and authority behind their

back, and to act as if they were the uncontrolled masters of their own movements.

But we must advance *even a step beyond this*. My friends, are there not some here who have long made a profession of religion, and waited on gospel ordinances, and deemed themselves entitled to the enjoyment of all Christian privileges, but who, up to this moment, have never in good earnest sought to have a personal interest in Christ, and who have never honestly and unreservedly surrendered themselves to Him, to be saved by Him in His own way, and to be His willing servants in all things? These people are not deformed, perhaps, by any gross external blemishes. They keep within the range of what is, upon the whole, lawful and consistent in outward conduct. They are neither dishonest in their dealings, nor profane in their talk, nor licentious in their mode of living. But yet their heart is set upon the world. By its maxims rather than by Christ's word they are guided. They have no deep and humbling sense of their ruined estate as sinners, and therefore no sense of their need of a better righteousness than their own, that they may stand with acceptance before God. They are displeased when hard pressed by the doctrines of regeneration and repentance, as if these were only necessary for heinous transgressors, not for such as observe all the decencies of life, and are not strangers to acts of charity. In a word, if the religion of Christ is briefly and emphatically summed up in the renouncing of self, and taking up the cross and following Christ, they have none of it, for they live to self; they submit to no sacrifice for Christ's sake. Theirs is a religion actually without Christ and without the Spirit, without regeneration, without repentance, without holiness; and yet they have the Bible, they sometimes read it, and they call themselves Christians. Alas, they form a very numerous class, and we may be thought uncharitable when we speak of them as trampling under foot the Son of God. But we must bring this charge against them. The Lord Himself says, 'He that is not with me is against me; and He that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad.' Now these mere worldly religionists, if we may so call them, are certainly *not with* Christ. They will not



receive Him as He offers Himself to them; they love the world and its ways more than Him and His truth; they seek not His Spirit; they are indifferent, if not opposed, to all the great purposes of His mission, and unfriendly to everything that is spiritual and soul-elevating in religion. Not being *with* Christ, then they are *against* Him; not honouring Him in their heart, they are regarded as despising Him; not receiving Him, they virtually reject Him. They put their foot upon His Word when it calls them to surrender themselves in soul, body, and spirit to His authority; and thus, in the strong language of the text, they put their foot upon Himself. The infidel and the blasphemer, then, the men who retain their lusts while they call themselves Christians, and the nominal professors of Christianity, who will not truly embrace Christ, because they love the world and their secret sins too well, are all to be comprehended *in one class*. Amid great diversity in character and conduct, and in the manifestation of their enmity to the Saviour, they stand united on this common ground, that they put away from them the salvation which He holds out to them, that they will not have Him to reign over them, and that they show strong contempt of His person, His work, His truth, and His blood.

II. I now come, in the second place, to illustrate and enforce the heinous nature of the sin which is thus committed. Here there is large room for remark, but I shall confine my observations within as brief space as possible.

It is a principle in accordance with right reason as well as with Scripture, that while every sin, as the transgression of God's law, deserves His wrath and curse, there are peculiar circumstances which intensify and aggravate the guilt of sin, and throw a deeper shade over the conduct of the transgressor. One of these circumstances always taken into account, is the dignity and character of the party against whom an offence is committed, and the relation in which he stands to the offender. The apostle desires to have this fully in our view, when he writes the words, 'He that despised Moses' law died without mercy: of how much sorer punishment

shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot *the Son of God?*

From a consideration, then, of what Christ is, and of the relation in which he stands to men, I argue the heinousness of the sin of despising and rejecting Him. And out of the very many particulars that might be noted here, I would, without much regard to the order in which they are stated, select three, viz. : Christ *the Son of God* ; Christ *the Ambassador of God* ; and Christ *the Saviour of sinners*.

1. First, Christ is the *Son of God*, and heinous therefore is the sin of despising and rejecting Him. Although Jesus Christ was found in fashion as a man, and had externally nothing about Him to attract the admiration of the world, He was truly the Son of God ; the Creator of all things ; the Lord of the universe ; the Judge of all. As really as He was the Son of man, He was the *eternal Son of God*. In the Bible, the prophets speak, and the apostles write ; but the truth revealed is from Christ the Son of God, who by His Spirit taught them. Then, when the testimony of the Bible is to the effect that all men have sinned, and are under wrath by nature ; that they are utterly helpless, and that left to themselves they must perish for ever ; and when this testimony is disregarded or rejected, it is the Son of God who is treated with contempt, yea, who is made a liar. When Christ is offered to sinners as the portion of their souls, in such language as the following : ‘ Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread ? and your labour for that which satisfieth not ? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness ; ’ and when men are too much occupied in the pursuit of sin, or in their worldly business, to listen to the call ; it is sin and the world that are welcomed as the soul’s portion, while the *Son of God*, in whom dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, is contemptuously put away.

Numerous are the claimants for admission to the heart, to occupy a place there. Among the rest, Christ stands at the door and knocks. Whatever promises to bring worldly honour or profit, or present enjoyment, is willingly admitted ; but, if I may so speak, the door is rudely shut in the face of

the *Son of God*. The counsels of earthly superiors are listened to with respect, and their advice is followed, even when it involves no little self-sacrifice ; but when the *Son of God* stands forth to counsel, with one hand pointed upward to heaven, and the other downward to the abyss of darkness, as if He would draw sinners out of it, and raise them to blessedness, they close their eyes and their ears : ‘ They will have none of His counsel ; they despise all His reproof.’ Yes, with such indignity do the worms of the dust treat their Creator and their Lord, who with a word could crush them down into the pit of misery for ever.

The aggravated sinfulness of their procedure is strikingly signified in the parable of the vineyard, when, after various servants had been sent to the husbandmen, and shamefully treated, it is said, Last of all, the lord of the vineyard sent unto them his son, saying, They will *reverence my son*. It is plain from this that the guilt of dishonouring and rejecting Christ is just proportioned to the reverence which is properly due to Him. And with what measure, therefore, can we estimate the enormity of the guilt of those who treat with scorn and contempt *the eternal Son of God* ?

2. But again, secondly, Christ is God’s *Ambassador*, and heinous therefore is the sin of despising and rejecting Him. In this character He often refers to Himself, saying that He *was sent* by the Father, and that He did not speak His own words, but the words which the Father gave Him. Into this world, which is in rebellion against the Most High, the Son of God came, with an offer of pardon and peace to the rebels, out of the free mercy of the Father.

Among all nations the person of an *ambassador* is regarded as inviolate, and his character sacred. His words are listened to as not his own, but those of the sovereign he represents ; and any insult or injury offered to him is counted an insult or injury to his sovereign. This, which is the law of nations, is the law of the Bible also. Thus Christ says to the apostles, who were His ambassadors, as He Himself was the Father’s, ‘ He that heareth you, heareth me ; and he that despiseth you, despiseth me ; and he that despiseth me, despiseth Him that sent me.’ Then, when sinners, in their infatuation, refuse to

listen to God's ambassador, or hear His message only to turn it into ridicule, or to brand it with falsehood, they are regarded as acting thus toward the great God Himself. It is *He* whom virtually they refuse to listen to ; it is *His* truth they call in question or laugh at. How awful the thought ! The rebels, instead of receiving with gladness the overtures of mercy, spurn them, and tread the ambassador under foot, showing but too clearly, that if they had the power they would dethrone the Eternal One. What words can adequately describe the guilt of impiety so atrocious ? Her treatment of God's ambassador filled up the measure of Jerusalem's crimes, and made her the guiltiest city upon earth. But your guilt, ye who reject the gospel offer, is of still deeper dye, because ye have her doom to warn you, and you enjoy in greater fulness than she did the message of God's ambassador. Well may we say, pointing to the fall of Jerusalem, where the Lord was crucified, and to those who now disdainfully reject Him, and by their unbelief and ungodliness crucify Him afresh, ' If these things were done in Jerusalem, the green tree, what shall be done in you, the dry ?'

3. In the third place, Christ is offered to us as *the Saviour of sinners*, and heinous therefore is the guilt of despising and rejecting Him. In this character we behold Him invested peculiarly with those qualities which should draw guilty men toward Him, engage their confidence, and excite their love. When He came into the world, although He could not divest Himself of His divine perfections, He was pleased to conceal the glory of them under the veil of human flesh, and to manifest them no further than the weakness of those among whom he lived could bear the display. It was humility, meekness, tenderness, compassion, and love that formed the chief characteristics of the Saviour on earth. When the whole race of mankind lay under the withering curse of Jehovah, *He* came to take the weight of that curse upon Himself, that His people might escape. When the earth formed one vast prison-house, in which the condemned lay awaiting the day of doom, He descended to convert it into a grand arena for the display of grace and mercy. When a sacrifice was needed to make atonement for sin, He gave *Himself*, and took to Him the

human nature, that He might have what was adequate for an offering. When, without shedding of blood, there could be no remission, He shed His own precious blood for the remission of the sins of many. How then shall we speak of the reckless *folly*, as well as *guilt*, of those who despise and reject Him? *Their folly*. This would not be so marked and unaccountable if there were any possible way of obtaining salvation apart from Christ. But there is not; for 'there is salvation in no other. His name is the only name given under heaven among men, whereby we must be saved.' And if we reject Him, there is no alternative,—we must perish. *Then the guilt*. What do men put away from them when they put away Christ? The very embodiment of tenderness and love. They repay infinite condescension with contempt; infinite love with blackest ingratitude.

They may speak as they will; but if they had lived in the days of Christ, they would have been busy among those who spat upon, and buffeted, and dragged to the cross the meek and holy sufferer; and who, when He hung there, wagged their heads in derision, and embittered His last moments with their fiendish mockery. What punishment can adequately visit such a crime?

III. This leads me, in the third place, to speak of the terrible consequences which result from despising and rejecting Christ. The apostle does not formally specify these consequences here. As if no description could sufficiently embody the reality, he places the subject before us in the form of a question. Death without mercy was the punishment inflicted for the more aggravated breaches of the law of Moses; then 'Of how much sorer punishment,' he asks, 'shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God?' As he does not attempt to set forth this punishment by drawing any minute picture of its horrors, neither need we. For as eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor heart of man conceived the blessings which God hath laid up for them that love Him; so no accumulation of frightful images, no power of fancy brooding over all that is unsightly or terrible to men, could give us a right conception of hell-torment, which is the portion

of the despisers and enemies of Christ. It will only be known when it is experienced : yea, even experience will fail to reveal it fully, for experience has only to do with the past and the present, and the torment of hell is for ever. I shall not offer many remarks upon this part of the subject ; but a few are necessary, that by the terrors of the Lord we may endeavour to persuade men to flee from the wrath to come.

1. In the first place, then, I notice that the punishment of those who reject Christ, whatever may be the nature of it, is *just* and *reasonable*. All sin as committed against God is an infinite evil, and deserves an infinite punishment. This is its just recompense of reward. And the particular sin of which we have been speaking, as being a *direct* insult to the majesty of the Son of God, aggravated by the circumstances of His acting as God's ambassador, and coming into the world on a mission of mercy for the salvation of sinners, surely deserves the most condign punishment. And besides, the punishment, however intense it may be, does not overtake the sinner who has heard the gospel, without his being duly warned. 'If I had not come and spoken unto them,' said Christ, 'they had not had sin : but now they have no cloak for their sin. Now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father.'

When the way of life is plainly revealed, and every inducement is held out to sinners to enter on it ; and when, on the other hand, the fate which will overtake them, if they make light of all this, is as clearly set before them ; they can neither complain of the *justice* nor of the *reasonableness* of God's procedure, when He deals with them as He has declared He will do. Every excuse will be unavailable at the judgment ; and every sinner will be condemned out of his own mouth ; because, when he was urged to embrace Christ, he *would* not ; and when he was warned of his danger, he despised the warning.

2. But I notice, in the second place, that the punishment of those who reject the Saviour will consist of suffering beyond conception exerceuiating. This, indeed, will be no small element of it, that the lost sinner will have to accuse himself as the cause of his own destruction. False friends may have seduced him, and Satan's influence has been incessantly employed for his ruin ; but, 'Ah,' he must say, 'I was warned

against these; I yielded to them when I knew that they sought my ruin: I am lost, and *I have destroyed myself*?

But, besides the pangs of self-accusation and remorse in the place of torment, as we can plainly gather from Scripture, there will be experienced sufferings the most intense in soul and body. Infinite justice lights up the fire of hell; and omnipotence, without any pleading of mercy to soften it, heaps its thunderbolts of wrath upon the head of the condemned. 'In the hand of the Lord there is a cup, and the wine is red; it is full of mixture; and He poureth out of the same: but the dregs thereof, all the wicked shall wring them out, and drink them.'

Some dreamy sentimentalists cleave to the vain fancy, that Jehovah is too merciful to inflict such suffering upon His creatures. But we must believe His own word rather than their idle speculations. The Bible says that there is 'a worm that dieth not, and a fire that is not quenched.' It says, 'The Lord beholds, and His eyelids try, the children of men. Upon the wicked He shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and an horrible tempest: this shall be the portion of their cup.'

3. In the third place, I notice that their punishment will be *eternal*. And this is the most awful consideration connected with the subject. 'The smoke of their torment ascendeth for ever and ever;' 'Depart, ye cursed, into *everlasting* fire, prepared for the devil and his angels.' The Scripture is decisive of the question of the eternity of punishment. But reason itself might decide it. For suffering is the proper fruit of sin. And as the wicked in hell will always be sinning, hating God, and blaspheming Him, so their suffering must be endless. When the faintest ray of hope streaks our future prospects on earth, it makes the severest pain endurable. But hope is utterly extinguished in hell. When the sufferer lies tossing in agony upon his bed throughout the night, he thinks relief will come when the day dawns. But there will be no dawn of day in the murky pit of torment. There the soul is doomed to the blackness of darkness for ever.

My friends, let those of you who are still without Christ, because up to this moment you have rejected Him, sit down this evening and ponder the truth, that the punishment of sin

is eternal. Give your mind full scope ; think of ages and ages rolling on, and torment keeping pace with them. Try to realize, so far as you can realize the fact, that at every successive point in the future, the torment is only begun, because it is *never, never* to cease ; and surely you will not retire to rest, without falling down upon your knees and praying that God, for Christ's sake, would be merciful to you, and give you a heart to embrace Christ, and wholly and unreservedly to surrender yourselves to Him. Oh ! what is worldly good, what is the wealth and honour and pleasure of the world, though they were all yours to the utmost of your heart's desire, if you have them with a lost soul—if it shall have to be said of any of you, as of the rich man in the parable, he died, and was buried, and in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torment ? May the Lord send among us His quickening Spirit, that we may improve our day of grace, and flee from this awful doom ! Amen.



## XXVIII.

### THE DANGERS OF SELF-DECEPTION.

‘ Let no man deceive himself. ’—1 COR. III. 18.

THESE words, in their immediate connection with the surrounding context, appear to have been designed to put the Corinthians upon their guard against the doctrines of false teachers, who, by their eloquence, were drawing some of them away from the simplicity of the gospel, and also against the tendency, natural to all men, to value mere intellectual acquirements and worldly wisdom more than the gifts and graces of the Holy Spirit. But although the words are thus, in the first instance, of limited application, yet they contain a general maxim which every member of the Church of Christ may most profitably take home to himself, as an admonition to examine what is his real condition in the sight of God, and whether or not his hopes with reference to eternity are built upon a sure foundation. It is in this general sense that I would regard the text, and endeavour to illustrate it, in the present discourse, as just placing before us in another light such impressive statements as the following: ‘ Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates.’ ‘ If a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself. But let every man prove his own work.’ No inquiry can transcend in importance that which we are commanded to institute, as to the reality of our faith and hope in Christ, of our being in the family of God, and of our being able on good ground to look forward to the enjoyment of the heavenly inheritance. It is quite possible for us to be mistaken on these momentous questions. A man *may* think himself to be something, when he is nothing.

‘There is a way which seemeth right to a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.’ Hence arises the necessity of our examining ourselves, of our being jealous over ourselves with godly jealousy—in a word, of our making close application to ourselves of such a statement as we have in the text: ‘Let no man deceive himself.’ The purpose of the present discourse, then, is wholly practical. There is a hypocrisy which puts on religion as a cloak to deceive others, and to gain certain worldly ends. But there is also another kind of hypocrisy by which men deceive *themselves*: unwarrantably appropriating to themselves the promises and hopes of the gospel, mistaking certain feelings and experiences and convictions, which are not the fruits of the Holy Spirit’s grace, although they somewhat resemble them, for the proper evidences of conversion; and thus unconsciously moving onward to eternal misery, while they think they are in the path which leads to heaven. It is to unmask this second kind of hypocrisy, and to prevent any here from taking the counterfeit of religion for what is genuine, that I would endeavour to make one or two applications of the admonition in the text.

When we read the marks of God’s people which are noted in the Scripture, and the exercises of godly men as given in their diaries or in the history of their life, we gladly identify their case with our own, where we can trace any apparent resemblance, and feel as if we had some ground whereon to rest for eternal life, because we seem to be exercised as they were. We may forget, however, all the while, that to be among the people of God, and to have any title to their inheritance, we must be, like *them*, united to Christ by faith, and partakers of the Spirit’s converting and sanctifying grace. Most needful therefore it is that we listen to the word which is expressly sent to preserve us from this ruinous delusion: ‘Let no man deceive himself.’ In the first place, then, I would specify a few particulars with respect to which the professed disciples of Christ are in danger of deceiving themselves, imagining that these are infallible evidences of their being in a state of grace, or at least in a hopeful state with regard to eternity; and then, secondly, I would make some special improvement of the subject.

I. In the first place, then, let no man deceive himself by imagining that he is in a state of grace merely because he can say that he believes the Bible to be true. If we were to fix upon any one criterion by which rather than another the genuineness of Christian discipleship might be made out beyond question, we would be disposed to say it is *faith*. Without this it is impossible to please God ; and having this wrought in our heart, we have one of the unquestionable proofs that we are the children of God. Yet there may be a faith which is not saving, and which therefore is not a fruit of the Holy Spirit's gracious operation. There is good warrant from Scripture, we think, for the distinction which the older divines used to make between saving faith and other kinds, such as mere historical belief, temporary faith, and the faith by which miracles were performed. But all that we are concerned with at present, is the propriety of this distinction with reference to saving faith and mere historical belief. You believe that the Scriptures are the Word of God, and that they can be demonstrated to be so by evidence which is beyond all reasonable challenge. You would shudder at the thought of being classed with infidels who scoff at the blessed book and call it an imposture. You profess that your religion is based upon the Bible, and that by *its* authority, and not by the opinion of fallible men, you are guided in all matters pertaining either to doctrine or to practice. And this wears so much the appearance of a *real* profession of Christianity, that you obtain credit among others for being the friends of true religion, and think that you are entitled to be regarded as true Christians. Now, we do not doubt your sincerity ; and when there is general consistency of conduct combined with such profession as you make, we would deem it most *uncharitable*, as well as *unwarrantable*, to cast any suspicion upon the genuineness of the profession. But the subject assumes altogether another aspect when it comes to be a question, *not* between you and the judgments which are formed of you by your fellow-creatures, but between you and Him who searcheth the heart, and whose judgment is according to truth ; and it is in this view that we would have you seriously to consider it. We say, then, that the sincere

belief that the Bible is the Word of God does not give you of itself a place among Christ's real disciples, nor any well-founded hope of reaching heaven. This may be shown by many considerations. Thus, for example, the great body of the Jews in our Lord's time believed most firmly in the Scriptures as a divine revelation, and were most scrupulous in the performance of all the external services which were enjoined by the law. You cannot be more sincere in your conviction that the Bible is true than they were, and yet most of them perished, because they would not receive and submit to Christ, to whom the Bible points as the only Saviour. And more than this, there is not one among the condemned at this moment, who while on earth had the opportunity of knowing what is revealed in the Scriptures, although he did not lay it to heart *then*, who does not now believe that the Bible is from heaven,—who does not now feel that its lessons, which he was once accustomed to despise, are all stamped with the seal of God's authority. Yea, and more even than this, the devils themselves believe that there is a God, that Jesus Christ is the Holy One of God, that He has power to save sinners of the human race, and that the Scripture is the Word of God. Yes, the devils believe and tremble. The dark abodes of hell, then, are full of faith, understanding by the term mere intellectual or historical belief in the truth of all that is recorded in the Bible. There is something, my friends, very startling in this idea, and well worthy of the earnest consideration of all professed Christians. We all feel that it is according to justice that those who have presumed to dishonour the Word of God, by treating it with contempt, or calling in question its veracity, should be punished for their presumption. We draw a deep line of distinction between the scoffing infidel and the man who exhibits reverence for the Scriptures, and we think that the latter is at least not excluded from hope. But, according to the statements just made, *infidelity cannot* be cherished in the place of torment: *belief* reigns there. There is no questioning *there* of the truth that God is, and that the Bible is a revelation of His mercy through Jesus Christ His Son; but alas! the belief has been wrought too late; it brings no hope or consolation with it to the miserable beings who are shut

up in that prison-house,—it only aggravates their torture that they should have madly hardened themselves in rebellion against God, and rejected *Him* whose salvation was pressed so often on their acceptance. Let no man, then, deceive himself by supposing that a mere notional belief of the truth will save him. The truth points to Christ; and the faith that saves is the sinner's receiving and embracing Christ, held out in the gospel offer as able and willing to give eternal life to all who place confidence in Him. In other words, the belief of the testimony which God hath given concerning His Son, as the deliverer from wrath to come, must be accompanied with the opening of the heart to receive Christ, and the submission of the whole heart and soul to His authority.

2. In the second place, let no man deceive himself by imagining that he is in a state of grace, because he feels occasionally deep convictions of sin. There are few cases recorded of the religious experience of true believers in which deep and sometimes painful exercises of soul on account of sin are not brought to light. This is nothing else, indeed, than what might be looked for, since it is one of the special works of the Spirit 'to *convince* men of sin.' And not unfrequently the conviction is both intensely agonizing and long continued. In some cases, indeed, the way to permanent peace through faith in Christ has been so full of disquietude and alarm as almost to dethrone reason itself. Now, when we read of this work of conviction, and of the mental suffering with which it was accompanied in some who afterwards became eminent for their piety and their devotedness to the service of Christ, and when we think that we, too, have had our convictions and our bitter pangs along with them, we are ready to conclude, that having passed through the same ordeal with God's people, we may count ourselves among them. And thus it may contribute to seal us up in a false and ruinous self-security, that we have on some occasions been under deep concern about our spiritual state. Let it be observed, then, that painful conviction of sin is by no means an unequivocal sign of a gracious operation upon the heart. When there has been good moral training in infancy and youth,—and more especially, when, along with this, there has

been inculcated upon the mind reverence for the Word of God, and for everything sacred,—there is thereby produced a certain tenderness of conscience, which is never afterwards wholly destroyed, except when a man plunges recklessly into the vortex of dissipation and crime. This tenderness of conscience, then, gives point to the threatenings of the law, and produces uneasiness under them very similar to that which is felt by the true penitent. Powerful appeals made in the preaching of the Word to sinners, respecting the evil of sin and its fearful consequences, produce a strong impression upon those who are thus sensitive and susceptible; and they are moved and troubled and humbled so that you would suppose them truly exercised by a sense of sin, and anxious to obtain deliverance. Some people, too, it may be observed, are *constitutionally* of an excitable temperament, and are unable to place restraint upon their feelings. On such, strong and graphic representations of the misery which will sooner or later overtake the impenitent, of the awfulness of future punishment, and the eternally hopeless condition of the condemned, make a vivid and solemn impression; so that they seem verily to be exercised as the people were on the day of Pentecost, when ‘they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?’ Further, it is to be noticed that afflictive visitations of Providence contribute sometimes to produce a somewhat similar state of feeling in the case of those who, in ordinary circumstances, could not be described as sensitive or excitable. The subdued and solemnized frame of mind which is wrought under the rod, opens up a pathway for the lessons of the divine Word to the heart and conscience; the realities of eternity are seen in a new light, and the consciousness of personal guilt, in connection with the felt certainty of judgment, startles the sinner from his sleep of self-security, and makes him tremble.

Now, in all these instances we admit at once the *sincerity* of the convictions which are excited, and of the humiliation and confession of sin with which they are accompanied. There is no design or attempt to impose upon others, by a pretence of feeling which is not at the time truly cherished.

But what we would have you ponder is this, that there may be with all this a dangerous self-deception, against which it is most needful to guard.

Conviction of sin, with sorrow and mental anguish, may well be regarded as a hopeful sign of the commencement of a work of grace ; but then it *may* also be accounted for by natural causes, and is therefore no proof that the Spirit of God has touched the heart. ‘There is a sorrow of the world which worketh death.’ Felix trembled while Paul ‘reasoned of righteousness and temperance and judgment to come.’ Judas repented and threw back the wages of iniquity, and was so agonized in spirit that he felt life to be insupportable.

And then, further, where is the conviction of sin felt as in the regions of despair, which grace does not reach ? There it is the endless source of misery unmitigated. Mere conviction, then, so far from being by itself an evidence that the Spirit of God has been dealing with us, leaves it as a question whether we are not suffering, in such proportion as it may be suffered on earth, the same kind of punishment, in one respect, as the finally impenitent and condemned have to endure for ever. Be persuaded then, my friends, not to be satisfied with the fact that you have been under very painful conviction of sin, as indicating that you have one of the marks of God’s believing people. This is true only, if from conviction you have been led onward to seek and to find peace with God through the atoning blood of Christ, that was shed for the remission of the sins of many.

3. In the third place, let no man deceive himself by imagining that he is in a state of grace, because from time to time he feels some desires and longings after God, and after the enjoyment of His favour, and of the heavenly felicity. *Generally* it holds good, that the unconverted feel toward God as if they would say unto Him, ‘Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways ;’ while, in contrast with this, the feelings of the truly converted are expressed in such language as this, ‘My soul thirsteth for God, the living God ;’ ‘My soul followeth hard after God ;’ ‘The Lord is the portion of mine inheritance, and of my cup.’ Now, sometimes feelings of this kind are transiently excited in the minds of those who are strangers to vital religion, and for this reason they think

that they may appropriate to themselves the hopes of believers, or at least that they are in a different condition from those who are utterly alienated from God. Let us then endeavour, for a few moments, to set this matter in its proper light. It is a common remark, and it is true, that the soul of man cannot be adequately satisfied with created good, except when it is so degraded and debased as to have lost almost *every* vestige, intellectual as well as moral, of what it originally was. Certainly, where the benefit of Christian education has been enjoyed, and the elements of Scripture knowledge are still retained, the soul does thirst for something better than mere sensual gratification, or pleasure drawn from mere worldly sources. The highest enjoyments of an earthly kind satiate. They lose their relish; they are accompanied with dissatisfaction, and sometimes with bitter remorse. The soul is oppressed with languor when excitement passes away. It feels that it has got no real resting-place, either for the present or for the future; while, at the same time, it also feels that it needs one. There is thus, if we may so speak, a natural preparation made for the heart's welcoming some of the discoveries which are made in the Bible. The love of God, the compassion of Christ, the blessedness of heaven, are themes which can be pleasantly contemplated; they come like gleams of light to a prisoner in a dark dungeon. They seem to bring within a man's reach that which he has in vain sought for in the world—pure and elevated satisfaction.

Even when he is again and again drawn back into his former follies, he does not lose sight altogether of these pleasing subjects of meditation. On the contrary, he can take some comfort from the thought that, after all, the world's pleasures have not been able wholly to drive these better things from his mind, and that he knows where to find what will make him truly blessed. Yea, even while he is enjoying as keenly as any what ministers to the lust of the eye and the lust of the flesh, he can affect to pity the poor slaves of folly and pleasure, who spend their life in a vain show, and have no relish for the comforts and the cheering prospects of religion.

Now we say the condition of such a person is eminently perilous; and *that* the more so, because he is able to flatter



himself that he is not of the class of the ungodly and dissolute, who have no religion and no care for it. His occasional contemplation of heavenly things keeps him, as it were, within sight of heaven; and because he desires to be raised thither in the end, he imagines that he is in the sure path to reach it. His folly in this respect is like that with which the mariner would be chargeable, who, ardently desiring to reach his destined haven, should fall asleep expecting to find himself there when he awoke, and forgetting the rough conflict with wind and wave that must be encountered ere his hope is realized. My friends, thoughts about the love of Christ, and the good things which He hath laid up in heaven for them that love Him, will not advance you one step on the journey toward the actual enjoyment of them.

It is very true that such thoughts are habitually in the mind of Christ's believing people, but this circumstance does not place you among them. No doubt the condemned, who have rejected Christ, and are suffering the penalty of their unbelief, think often of His love which they made light of, and of the blessedness of heaven which they have for ever forfeited. The parable of the rich man and Lazarus justifies this conclusion. *Dives* would have fain partaken of some of heaven's comfort, to ease his terrible torment; and we may be sure that the wretched inmates of hell would purchase, if they could, at any price, the blessedness which they recklessly put away from them when it was within their reach; yea, that the very thought of that blessedness adds intensity to their miseries. Do not, then, suffer yourselves to be imposed upon by the vain dream, that because sometimes you are led to think of God, and that because sometimes you can reflect with some delight upon the pictures which fancy draws of heaven, all is right and safe with you. It may be with *you* as with the people of whom Isaiah speaks, as disappointed in their ardent expectations, and whose feelings he thus describes: 'It shall even be as when an hungry man dreameth, and behold he eateth; but he awaketh, and his soul is empty: or as when a thirsty man dreameth, and behold he drinketh; but he awaketh, and behold he is faint, and his soul hath appetite.' That God may be enjoyed, and that heaven may be your in-

heritance, there must be something more than pleasing thoughts of the divine love, and passing visions of heavenly glory ; you must be brought into favour and friendship with God through Jesus Christ, and prepared for heaven by the Spirit's sanctifying grace.

4. In the fourth place, let no man deceive himself by imagining that he is in a state of grace, because of important changes for the better which he has effected upon his conduct. It is one of the indispensable marks of true repentance, that sin is not only condemned and sorrowed for, but also forsaken. And the outward reformation is the index to the penitent feelings of the heart. When, therefore, in any case we perceive a marked improvement *externally* ; when we see a man who was licentious or irregular in his life, abandon his evil habits, and become the very reverse of what he was ; when we see one who, although not dissolute or immoral, was yet altogether indifferent to religion, exhibiting a relish for serious books, for the society and conversation of religious men, and for sacred ordinances ; when we see willingness to promote schemes of Christian benevolence where there was something like contempt of them before ; then *we are bound* to attribute these happy changes to the effect of true repentance. It were a breach of the law of charity to form a different judgment in *any particular case*. And it is not wonderful that, even when the reformation which has been wrought is not so marked and manifest as we have above supposed, those in whom it has been wrought should regard themselves as having escaped from the bondage of corruption, and as brought out into that liberty which is one of the characteristics and privileges of God's children.

Yet even here we are constrained to remark that there is room at least for the possibility of self-deception. And although we could not presume to say absolutely to any individual in these circumstances, that he is buoying himself up with a false hope, we would say that it would be well for him to examine carefully the security of the foundation on which he rests.

We do not speak thus without sufficient reason. Let us turn our minds to the subject for a little. First of all then,

it cannot, unhappily, be denied that examples are to be found of persons who have exhibited apparently such reformation of habit and conduct as has been above alluded to, and have for a time gained for themselves the character of being really under the influence of divine truth, but who have afterwards turned back to their old ways,—thus showing that they had experienced no change of heart. This consideration alone, although it would not warrant us to regard with suspicion the professions of any individual, yet certainly does authorize us to warn men against becoming the victims of self-deception in a matter so important.

Then, again, it is possible to account for changes of the kind we are speaking of without supposing that there has been any intervention of the Spirit's saving grace. Even godless and dissolute men are not always so impervious to appeals made to their reason and conscience, as not to feel that it would be far better for them, in many respects, to throw off the fetters in which they are bound by their besetting sins, and to get free from their degrading propensities. Strong argument, addressed to their reason and to their self-interest, may prevail to beget in them the determined purpose of reformation; and they may have such strength of will, and such moral energy, as to carry out the purpose not for a brief season merely, but so as to impart to the whole of their life afterwards a complexion wholly different from what it formerly bore. Such transformations of character we read of as effected even upon heathen men by the arguments of their philosophers, but it does not amount to conversion.

And then, besides all this, and as if for the express purpose of keeping us from deceiving ourselves in a matter so deeply affecting our highest interests, we have certain examples referred to in the Scripture to serve as warnings to us. Thus the wicked Ahab was so moved by the threatenings denounced against him by Elijah, that 'he humbled himself, and put sackcloth upon his flesh, and fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly,' presenting all the indications of true penitence, and yet we know that he was unchanged at heart. Thus Herod also showed favour to John the Baptist, and heard him gladly, and did many things which he enforced in his preach-

ing; yet he remained in heart alienated from God. So that, altogether, there must be something more than external reformation, however salutary and desirable in itself that may be, to entitle us to bear the name and to cherish the hopes of the redeemed.

I might proceed to specify other cases in which men are in danger of deceiving themselves, by mistaking for a work of grace that which only bears some resemblance to it; for the subject is of wide application. But the four which have been mentioned, and which are among the most prominent, must suffice in the meantime. There may be an admission that the Bible is the Word of God; there may be occasionally deep convictions of sin; there may be some desires and longings after God, and after the enjoyment of His favour, and of the heavenly felicity; and there may be important changes for the better effected upon the conduct; while none of these things may be attributable to the operation of saving grace. Now, my friends, it is not for the purpose of creating unnecessary fear and disquietude, or of unsettling the mind of any humble follower of Christ, that I have called your attention to this subject. This would be an indefensible exercise of the Christian ministry, and altogether at variance with the spirit of Jesus Christ, who came to speak words in season to those that were weary; who came not to break the bruised reed, or to quench the smoking flax. But since it is possible that self-deception may be practised in this matter which touches eternal interests, surely it is better that men be awakened to a sense of their real condition in the sight of God, although at the expense of some mental disquietude, than that they should think that all is well with them, when they are on the very verge of destruction.

II. I would now, in the second place, and briefly, make some improvement of what has been said, for the purpose of removing doubts that may be felt as to the way in which the operation of *saving grace* may be ascertained. This, indeed, has partly been done already under each separate head, but there is room for some additional remarks. You will observe, then, that all along it has been admitted that the various

points which have been singled out as not affording *in themselves* satisfying evidence of a work of grace, are yet to be found in those who are truly under the power of grace. But, at the same time, there are some other things awaiting to make the evidence of this complete, to show that there is grace in the heart. And what are these things? I can only mention one or two.

1. Then I observe, in the first place, that it is one mark of the operation of saving grace, when there is no resting in convictions, or experiences, or reformations, or anything else, but in Christ Himself, as the object of faith and the ground of hope. It is only when the soul, after searching about in vain for deliverance from the burden of guilt which presses it down, and from the fears which cloud the prospect of the future, looks away from all other refuges to Christ, and is satisfied with Him alone, that it finds peace. And when at any time afterward it is troubled by painful convictions of sin, it is only by again casting the load of its guilt upon Him that peace is restored to it. When the thought of appearing before God in the judgment would overwhelm the believer, he is sustained by the reflection that Christ is the Lord his righteousness. When the difficulties that lie in the way to heaven seem insurmountable, it is Christ's word that cheers him: 'I will come, and take you to myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.' Therefore, my friends, if ye are thus habitually exercised in looking to Christ as *all* to you, wisdom and righteousness, and sanctification and redemption, then it is an evidence that the Holy Spirit *has* wrought and is working *in* you, as it is His peculiar office to bear witness for Christ. If, for example, any one here is startled by the consideration that he may have been deceiving himself by feelings and experiences which, after all, may only be mere natural emotions, and if he finds that he can recover himself by casting himself upon Christ as all his salvation, we would say that is a good proof that he is moved by the Spirit's grace.

2. In the second place, it is another mark of the operation of saving grace, when it is our habitual and earnest desire that Christ may be glorified. If a man can say from the heart, when he is in trouble, I am contented to endure what God is

pleased to send, and to wait for *His* time, if He will only enable me so to feel and think and speak that the name of Christ may not be dishonoured by me; if, in the execution of any religious duty or service, he can say sincerely, ‘I care not what account is taken of me, if only Christ’s cause is promoted, and His name glorified;’ if personal ease and convenience, and apparent worldly advantage, are all made to give way by the simple argument that thus the authority of Christ’s truth will be vindicated, and His name magnified; then we would say that it is not flesh and blood that prompt to all this, but the grace of the Holy Ghost.

3. In the third place, it is another mark of the operation of saving grace, when it is our habitual and earnest aim to be more and more conformed to Christ’s likeness. Great anxiety there often is on the part of Christians to have more sensible enjoyment of spiritual peace and comfort. The anxiety is not to be blamed, because peace and comfort are not only valuable privileges in themselves, but are conducive to important ends. But unspeakably more important is the attainment of an enlarged measure of the mind that was in Christ, and of the various heavenly graces which made Him fairer than the sons of men. This is truly the seal which the Spirit puts upon His own workmanship, and which fits us for heaven, as it is brought to us from heaven. Having this seal, we are known to others, and recognised by the Lord Himself, as His own precious property.

Now, in conclusion, my friends, if you would escape self-deception in the all-important matter of your eternal well-being, if you would pursue your way to heaven safely amid all the obstacles that cross your path, and all the adversaries that seek your ruin, take hold of Christ’s hand, which is stretched out toward you, and keep fast your hold of it. Then you have His guidance, His strength, and His presence, to help you onward, and you cannot perish, for none can pluck you out of His hand. Amen.

## XXIX.

### THE SPIRITUAL LIFE OUTWARDLY MANIFESTED.<sup>1</sup>

‘For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad ; so that we need not to speak anything. For they themselves show of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.’—1 THESS. I. 8, 9.

**T**HE view which we took of the spiritual life, when last discoursing of it, is that which is so often set before us in the Word of God, when it is described as hidden or secret ; and this view we felt it necessary to lay before you, for the purpose of guarding you against a prevailing error, that true religion has chiefly to do with the regulation of the conduct, and little with the heart. The popular notion is, that if a man discharges with propriety the duties of his station, and pays respect to divine ordinances upon the Sabbath, he has all the religion which is necessary to procure for him the name of a Christian, and all which is required to warrant him to cherish the hopes which the gospel of Christ holds forth to believers. To counteract this notion, I endeavoured to show you, that where there is spiritual life there is a great work carried on in the soul, in the mortification of sin, and the cultivation of holy and heavenly affections and desires, so that it may be truly said, ‘The kingdom of God is within a man.’ And then, following out the subject in another discourse, I adverted to some practical rules which might be made available for the mortifying of sin, and for advancement in holiness. Altogether, the impression which it was the purpose of these discourses to leave upon your minds was this, that one leading object of the gospel of Christ is to deliver us from that subjection to the influence of sin under which all men are

<sup>1</sup> The last of the series on the Spiritual Life.

naturally held, and to raise us to a condition which will render us fit for holding communion with the holy God on earth, and dwelling in His presence for ever.

But then, while we feel it necessary from time to time to inculcate the great principle, that the life of faith is in many respects hidden from the observation of the world, and that secret striving against sin, and disciplining of the heart and mind to submission to the will of God, must form part of the habitual exercise of every true follower of Christ, we took occasion to notice that the result of all this must be outwardly manifested. Just as the natural life is characterized by activity, and when mind and body are sound and vigorous, there is exertion suited to the place and profession which a man occupies in the world; so in the spiritual life, when the soul is in health and vigour, there is active exertion in the service of Christ.

The three prominent graces by which the Christian character is adorned, are love and faith and hope. In the exercise of these lies in great measure the hidden spiritual life of the Christian. But then their power and their working are *outwardly* developed. And so we read, in ver. 3 of the chapter from which the text is taken, of 'the labour of love, and the work of faith, and the patience of hope.' This, then, being the case, I have judged it necessary, having spoken before of the spiritual life as inward, or hidden, to call your attention in the present discourse to some of the *outward* manifestations of the spiritual life. There is a wide field here opened up to us if we were to traverse the whole, for the outward manifestation of the spiritual life embraces nothing less than the whole range of practical godliness. But my object, in the meantime, shall be to advert to one or two particulars which are to be regarded as *indispensable evidences* of the soul's life. It is never to be lost sight of that the great change wrought by the Spirit of God in conversion affects the *whole* man; and that the only substantial proof of its having been wrought lies in the recognition of the authority of God's law, and the increasingly successful endeavour that is put forth to have the whole heart and conduct conformed to it.

But then there are *certain points* of such pre-eminent import-



ance that we cannot well conceive of their being wanting in any case where the soul has really been quickened by the Spirit of God. Thus, for example, to look to the Thessalonians, whom the apostle addresses in the text, it was one mark of their having been savingly enlightened by the Spirit, that they turned to God from idols 'to serve the living and true God.' If they had professed to reverence the truths which the apostle proclaimed among them, and had admitted the folly of their idol-worship, while at the same time they supposed that it would tend to the peace and good order of society if they cherished their convictions in secret, and still adhered to the forms of worship which they had received from their fathers, every one will allow that their professions would have been hollow, and that they had not felt the living power of the truth. But their sincerity was demonstrated by their open renunciation of their idols, and turning to the service of the true God. Another thing, too, may be said of them, viz. that if, after having seen the sin and folly of idolatry, and having embraced the gospel which Paul preached, they had sat down satisfied with the benefit which had been conferred upon themselves, and indifferent to the condition of those among whom they lived, this would have amounted to a proof that neither the honour of Christ nor the preciousness of His word was made of much account among them. But they showed that they prized both, by their earnestness in spreading the knowledge which had made them blessed themselves. '*From you sounded out the word of the Lord,*' says the apostle, '*not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad ; so that we need not to speak anything.* For they themselves show what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God.' It is not my intention to confine myself altogether to the points which are suggested for consideration by this passage. But looking at it as embodying the general principle, that where spiritual life is imparted it will be outwardly made manifest, *i.e.* in other words, that Christ's people will be known by purity, I would proceed to point out some of its more prominent and indispensable manifestations.

I. And in the first place, I observe, that where there is spiritual life, there will be a renouncing of the sins which were formerly indulged, or, as it is expressed in the text, there will be ‘a turning to God from idols.’ A man’s idols are the forbidden propensities which he cherishes, and the habits and practices which, in opposition to the Word of God, he lives in. Sometimes these are so checked and restrained as to attract but little observation, while, at the same time, the general tenor of the life is comparatively blameless. And in such instances, when the work of the Spirit is experienced, there is not such a striking change produced upon the external conduct as all at once to indicate a transition from death to life. Yet, if the idols are enthroned in the heart rather than outwardly exhibited, they *are yet cast down* where grace reigns; and evidence is given of this in the decided relish which is shown for spiritual exercises. So that, although there may be but a slightly marked difference between the *outward* walk of some *before* and *after* their being made partakers of the Spirit of life, there are plain enough indications of the turning of the heart to God and to divine things.

In many cases, however, the course pursued by men, previously to their being quickened by the Spirit, is so palpably opposed to the law of God, and the objects of their sinful desire and regard, *i.e. their idols*, are so conspicuous, that if there were not a visible change upon their *whole* conduct when they profess to receive the gospel, their religion would at once be pronounced to be nothing better than a name. When a man has been the slave of any grovelling propensity; when he has been intemperate or a sensualist; when he has been noted for his love of the sinful amusements which are patronized by the world; when he has lived in the open violation of any of the divine commandments; when he has been addicted to the society of the ungodly and profane,—then the power of grace upon his heart must appear in his renouncing these forbidden sources of enjoyment, however painful the effort may be. The requirement of the Scripture is, that Christ’s people ‘come forth and be separate from all that degrades and pollutes the soul;’ and thus the vices and sinful amusements and unholy companionships, which before were counted neces-

sary to make the man happy, are sacrificed at Christ's command; and the transformation wrought upon the heart by the Spirit is accompanied with an outward reformation of the life. Such a change is essentially necessary, to furnish proof that the soul has been made spiritually alive. It could not be doubted for a moment that the Thessalonians had abandoned their idols, because they no longer went to the idols' temple; they offered up no more sacrifices there; they presented no more prayers and vows to the objects of their former worship. Even so, it must be equally beyond doubt, that those who profess to be Christ's now have experienced the new creation, by their living no longer in the gratification of their sinful lusts and appetites, but breaking the unholy yoke in which they were kept by them, and escaping from their power.

And here let this point be particularly noticed, that the apostle, in the text, not only describes the Thessalonians as having turned from their idols, but as having turned from them to God, 'to serve the living and true God.' This statement is of the greatest practical consequence. It is matter of common observation, that men who have been addicted to gross sins may turn from them, while they are still utter strangers to the power of true religion. A change in their outward condition may render it necessary for them to put restraint upon their irregular desires and inclinations. A regard to their character and to their health may have influence enough to keep them from excesses into which they would willingly plunge; and advancing years may correct many of the foolish practices into which youthful extravagance led. But all these changes, although most useful to the individual, and profitable to society, may have no more connection with a work of grace upon the soul, than there is between the abandonment of the toys of childhood and the graver pursuits of more mature life. *Where there is grace*, we say, there is the turning from idols to God. In this case, the unclean spirit is not cast out; while the chambers of the heart are left swept and garnished, but without any better occupant. *Christ* is taken in to reign where the idols reigned before, and the heart is given to Him.

Or, to speak without a figure, the quickened soul not only abjures the sins which were formerly its food and its chief

enjoyment, but it displays a relish for divine truth, and for those things which are pleasing to God. The covetous man not only opens his heart and his treasure when he is touched by the Spirit, but he takes an interest in spiritual objects, and contributes to their advancement. The blasphemer not only casts away his oaths, but he learns and loves to pray. The Sabbath-breaker not only reverences divine ordinances, but does what he can to bring others to reverence them also. The votary of intemperance and sensuality not only breaks off his habits, but seeks the society of those who fear and serve God. These are the fruits of gospel truth, when carried home effectually by the Spirit to the hearts of men. And where these and similar fruits are not produced, we say the evidences of real life are wanting.

Christ is the true vine, and His people are the branches. However unfruitful they may have been before, or however noxious the fruits they yielded, even grapes of Sodom and clusters of Gomorrah, yet, grafted into Him, they bring forth the fruits of righteousness, by which God is glorified.

In no part of Scripture is the practical change which the Holy Spirit produces upon men more strikingly stated than by the Apostle Paul in his first Epistle to the Corinthians, vi. 9: 'Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.' There could be no room for question as to the change which Christianity had thus effected upon the disciples at Corinth. They became epistles of Christ that could be known and read of all men. And what I urge is, that although there may not be so plain a deliverance from criminal excesses manifest in the case of those who are converted in a professedly Christian land, yet there will be as *real* a transformation, in their having been led to forsake their besetting sins, and to submit to the authority of the law of God.

Now, before we proceed further, a brief application may be

made of these remarks. We all call ourselves Christians; and if we really are so, we have all been quickened by the Spirit of God. Of this there can be no doubt. 'To as many as receive Christ, to them He gives power to be called the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name: who are born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.' Then, if we are born of the Spirit, we have put away the works of the flesh. And it *must be manifest* that we have done so. The carnal and unholy propensities of our nature have been crucified with Christ, when we embraced Him as our Lord; and though they still require us to have a watchful eye, lest again, as so many roots of bitterness, they spring up, defiling us, yet they no longer occupy their former place. From having, while unregenerate, yielded ourselves as servants to uncleanness and to iniquity; so, if we are Christ's, we have been led to yield ourselves as servants of righteousness unto holiness. All who are truly the disciples of the Saviour, have been sealed with His Spirit as His property unto the day of redemption; and this inward seal has its outward counterpart, in their being delivered from the bondage of corruption, and raised to the liberty of the children of God.

II. But now, in the second place, I observe, that where there is spiritual life, there will certainly be an interest exhibited in all things pertaining to the progress of Christ's kingdom, and a readiness to put forth efforts for the advancement of it.

Of the Thessalonians, as has been already said, it is remarked, that *from them 'sounded out the word of the Lord.'* The gospel came to them, not in word only, but also in power, and in much assurance, and in the Holy Ghost; and 'having freely received, they freely gave.'

Apart, perhaps, from the great sanctifying change which is wrought upon the whole frame of the soul by the gospel, when applied by the Spirit, there is nothing which more unequivocally shows the reality of the *life within*, than the interest and zeal and activity which are shown *externally* for the spread of the truth, that thereby God may be glorified in the salva-

tion of sinners. And how could it be otherwise? If the practical aim of the gospel be to implant in us *the same mind* that was in Christ, and to raise us to the exalted privilege of being like Him, then surely this must be one of the effects produced by it, that we pity those who are perishing in sin and ignorance, and do what we can to turn them from their sin to God. For was not this the very work in which Christ Himself was engaged while He sojourned upon earth; and is it not the work which He still prosecutes in His state of glory in heaven? And is it not among the principal ends for which He has given His Word, and set up His Church and His ordinances in the world, that by this instrumentality He may gather from our lost race a people to serve God on earth, and to enjoy Him for ever? Then we just cherish Christ's sympathies and fall in with His great plan, when we contribute in any way to the extension of His kingdom, by turning men from darkness unto light, and from the power of Satan unto God. In this view of the subject, then, every true disciple of Jesus is invested with the missionary office, and must exercise it also.

We look into a Christian family, and where the name is not a mere empty sound, we expect to see the heads of that family taking pains that the young, who are entrusted to their guardianship, be instructed in the Word of God, and taught to know God, and Jesus Christ whom He hath sent—whom to know is life eternal.

We look into a Christian school, and where the teacher is himself under the influence of the grace of God, we expect to find that, while he is careful that his youthful charge be taught the various branches of secular knowledge which they have been sent to acquire, he will omit no opportunity to direct their thoughts to the subjects of imperishable interest, and to lodge in their minds some fact or lesson from the Scripture, which, as good seed, may take root there, and bear precious fruit afterwards.

We look to those who are somewhat released from the cares and toils of ordinary business, and we expect to see them devoting some of the hours which would otherwise be spent in selfish indolence, or in self-gratification, to the interests of

some of the schemes of Christian benevolence, or to more immediate effort in the way of commending Christ to the perishing.

We look to those on whom the gifts of providence have been largely bestowed, and who might give, without missing it, what would render many happy; and we expect that, among the other channels in which their bounty flows, *this one* will be wide, whereby they may help to convey to poor lost sinners the bread and water of everlasting life.

We look, in a word, to all who have themselves tasted that the Lord is gracious, and expect to see some readiness to do something in their particular station for the honour of Christ, and the spiritual and eternal good of their fellow-men.

We would not presume to dictate, neither has any one a right to do so, in what particular direction any individual is bound to put forth his efforts. There are really no conflicting interests in the prosecution of the work of spreading the gospel. The field is the world; and whether at home or abroad, there is ample room for every man's labours. But one person may justly enough suppose that there are pressing claims in one quarter; while another feels himself more especially called upon to give his aid in another,—and all this is right. The great question is, that, amid the many competing claims, we do not remain inactive, consoling ourselves with the reflection, that as we cannot take part in every scheme for the advancement of the gospel, we may let all alone.

When Paul and his companions were anxious to preach in certain parts of Asia, where, no doubt, their labours were much needed, the Spirit forbade them. But this was not to set them aside from their work. Immediately there appeared a man of Macedonia to the apostle in a vision, saying, 'Come over, and *help us*.' And thither immediately, to this hitherto unexplored region, he and his friends repaired, leaving the wants of Asia to be supplied by some who had already received the benefit themselves, and would rejoice to communicate it to others. Even so still, there must be a division of labour in the spiritual field, as in the mechanical. Yea, and there will also be new spheres of operation for Christian effort opened up from time to time, provoking the selfish to cry out, Is

there to be no end of all this? And in answer to this question, we would say, 'There can be no end of it, until the whole world is evangelized. If you cannot press into the new field, others may be found willing. But occupy you the old ground, and be faithful to your trust there. And listen not for a moment to the suggestion, for it comes from the enemy, that, as you cannot do *every* thing, you may fold your hands and do nothing.'

On this part of the subject, my friends, the manifestation of spiritual life in the readiness which is exhibited to aid in the advancement of Christ's kingdom, I feel as if it were scarcely possible to speak with sufficient earnestness. The desire to spread the gospel is so interwoven with all Christian feeling and principle, that we cannot conceive it possible for a man to be a Christian who is an utter stranger to this impulse. But that we may not lose ourselves in generalities, I would remark that the mere cherishing of the desire will not avail. The prayer, 'Thy kingdom come,' which all learn to put up in their infancy, and which we repeat from day to day, is expressive of our desire that all the kingdoms of the world may become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of His Christ. But if we have indeed been visited with the quickening power of the Holy Ghost, then this prayer has been followed by active effort to hasten onward its fulfilment. Yes, and if we delight to be found where special supplication is offered for the spread of the gospel, the fruit will be manifest in our contributing toward the spread of it as God hath prospered us. If it be not so, our prayers are but a mockery; inasmuch as God has committed *to us*, as instruments, the accomplishing of the very work which we profess to have so much at heart. When we say to Him, 'Let Thy way be made known upon the earth, and Thy saving health among all nations,' His reply to us virtually is, 'To you is given the means of bringing about this result; by your efforts it is to be wrought out; go, then, and labour diligently.'

Let the followers of Christ, then, take home the lesson of their responsibility, and bestir themselves to greater activity in the missionary cause than they have ever yet exhibited. To what higher end can we consecrate a share of the good



which God in His providence has conferred upon us, than in aiding in the conversion of sinners, that His name may be glorified. Is not the cry heard on every side, which the apostle heard, 'Come and help us'? Does it not fall loudly and incessantly upon our ear from heathen lands, where our God is dishonoured, and man himself debased by the craft of the prince of darkness? Is it not wafted across the waters from our colonies, whither so many of our fellow-countrymen have been driven by hard necessity, and where, though they obtain the bread that perisheth, there is famine of the word and ordinances of God? Do not the spiritual miseries of the seed of Abraham, on whose hearts the veil of unbelief is yet spread, plead for our interposition in their behalf, that they may be brought to receive as their Lord Him whom their fathers crucified? Do not the dark designs of Popery require to be counteracted, and an agency employed where access can be found to rescue some who will hear from its soul-destroying errors? And is not the cry for help heard in tones which should touch our hearts yet more impressively, and awaken all our sympathies, from those in our own land, and at our own door, who are perishing in ignorance, in guilt, and in wickedness? Oh, surely the Spirit of Christ must have withdrawn from among us, and the callousness of the old carnal heart must have borne down all our better feelings; surely the life of Christ cannot be manifest among us, if we can hear these cries, and withhold our aid.

But before leaving this point, I would say especially, beware of what may be called a cheap philanthropy; beware of imagining that you have done your part, when you have expressed your feelings in behalf of schemes of benevolence, or have enlisted in their behalf the sympathies of others. The man who speaks in favour of what is needed for the spiritual and eternal good of his fellow-men, and yet will not help when he might, is among the most wretched and pitiable of all men. Far better it would be, to disclaim all connection with Christ and His kingdom at once, than pretend to *speak* for them, and *yet do nothing*.

III. But in the third place, I proceed to observe, that where

there is spiritual life, there will certainly be the habitual cultivation of *all* those graces which are peculiarly called the fruits of the Spirit, as love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, charity, meekness, temperance. Some of these, indeed, belong to what may be called the department of the *inner spiritual life*. Thus *peace* and *joy* are the peculiar privileges of the believer, flowing from his reconciliation with God through Jesus Christ, and from the hope he cherishes of being for ever with the Lord; and though the influence of them may be seen in his speech and conduct, yet they are rather sources of satisfaction to himself, than outwardly discernible by others. But the graces of which I would more especially speak at present are those which are displayed in a man's character and temper, as he appears in the transaction of business, and in the ordinary intercourse of life. And the doctrine I would inculcate is, that the quickening work of the Spirit in the heart is evidenced by such a change upon the *character* and *temper* of the believer, as to mould him into the likeness of Christ, who was loving, meek, humble, long-suffering, gentle, humane, and kind. This particular department of practical religion scarcely receives, we fear, that attention from Christians to which its importance entitles it. We are all more ready to associate with the idea of Christian excellence, such high exercises of faith, and such spirituality of mind, as make men wholly superior to the world, as if its concerns were almost beneath their notice. And I speak not to detract aught from the praise of those who, by the grace of God, have been raised so far above the standard of ordinary mortals. But then it must be remembered that the Christian life is a life *in* the world, although not *of* it; and that it is in our intercourse and dealings with others from day to day that we have chiefly to exhibit the pure and heavenly nature of that religion which we profess, and the reality of our Christian discipleship. It is from day to day, then, and just in the ordinary relations and transactions of life, that the graces of the Spirit must appear in us; in their combination and growth rendering us more and more assimilated to Christ, in feeling and speech, in temper and character.

I admit, however, most readily here, that as in the world

you will not find two individuals precisely alike in character and temper in every respect, so neither will you among Christ's genuine disciples. Grace destroys sin, but it does not efface all the natural and distinguishing characteristics of individual hearts and minds. Every believer retains his *individuality*, and thinks and feels in his own particular way, while yet *all* are transformed into the likeness of Christ. It is also to be observed, that while all the graces of the Spirit are planted, and have place, and grow in every believer, still some of these are more prominently developed in one, and some in another. *Meekness* predominates in the character of one, *love* in another, *humility* in a third, and *gentleness* in a fourth; while, at the same time, all are, in their measure, meek, and loving, and humble, and gentle. But while we mark these special differences among the followers of Christ, we do not find that the Scripture makes allowance for any of the qualities which are the opposites of these graces. We are expressly commanded to put away from us 'anger, wrath, malice;' and among the works of the flesh are enumerated, 'hatred, variance, wrath, and strife.' This, then, is the general conclusion to which we come, that where the spiritual life is, it will be indicated by a man's having his whole temper framed and governed by the law of Christ, so that he will strive to think and feel as Christ would have him do, yea, as Christ Himself did.

Now this, it must be acknowledged, implies habitual watchfulness and self-restraint, and in the present life is not *perfectly* attainable. The violent passions of anger, pride, and hatred are the natural inmates of the human breast; and many things there are in the ordinary intercourse of life to stir them into activity. Here, however, is just the field in which the believer is called to exercise himself, that he may subdue these raging passions, and exhibit the mildness and gentleness of Christ. I do not say, be it observed, that indignation and anger can in no circumstances be justified. For Christ Himself on some occasions displayed indignation, when He beheld the hypocrisy and hardened unbelief of the Pharisees; and in burning words He denounced terrible woes against them for these sins. And it is altogether impossible

for His people, who love Him, and desire the progress of His truth, to behold without feelings of mingled indignation and grief, the attempts of His enemies to dishonour Him, and to obstruct the spread of His gospel. It is impossible for them, without honest indignation, to see the powerful crushing the weak; to see grasping covetousness wringing the little they have from the hands of the poor and helpless. But the indignation which is excited by scenes like these must not form apology for *causeless* wrath. It must not be brought in to vindicate the ungovernable anger that is kindled either by a trifling word or even a more serious offence. For it is one of the rich triumphs of grace, and one of the victories which it enables the believer to gain over himself, and one of the proofs that he is a partaker of the life of Christ, when, under provocation and insult and injury, he can be meek and gentle as Christ was, when He stood, in the hall of the High Priest, among His enemies.

In coming to a close, I would say, that my purpose at present will in so far be answered, if what has been said lead you to consider seriously, whether, in the respects that have been mentioned, you have in yourselves the evidence that you have been quickened by the Spirit of God. For this is, after all, the great question. Between the soul quickened and the soul dead in sin, there is all the difference that holds between heaven and hell. And if you would escape from the one, and be raised to the other, you must have Christ yours, as the Lord your righteousness, and be partakers of His living Spirit. Oh that all may be led to seek in earnest these glorious privileges, for they are nearer to us than we think, if we would but truly ask them. Amen.

### XXX.

#### THE CHRISTIAN SOLDIER'S ARMOUR.

The first of the series of Lectures on Ephesians vi. 10-20.

THE Church at Ephesus was planted by the Apostle Paul, who laboured two years there, preaching the gospel with remarkable success. The interest which he felt in that Church was shown in the address which he delivered to the elders of it, when he was on his way to Jerusalem, where bonds and imprisonment awaited him, and in the epistle which he wrote to it, from which we have selected the text. It is manifest from what he said to the elders (Acts xx.), and from what he says in this epistle, that he was afraid that the Ephesians would have to contend not only against outward troubles, but also against false doctrine, which was still more dangerous. But he was careful to put them upon their guard; and it is interesting to notice that, about thirty years afterwards, when the Apostle John wrote the Book of Revelation, with its introductory epistles to the Seven Churches in Asia, he commends the Church of Ephesus for its rejection of false doctrine, and adherence to the true, and makes it his only charge against it, that it had departed from its first love. This was indeed a charge in itself very serious; inasmuch as the decline of love in a Church is equivalent to a decline of spirituality and of vital action. But still, although the Ephesians had not acted fully in accordance with the admonitions of the Apostle Paul, often expressed in the epistle before us, to make themselves distinguished for their love to the Saviour and to one another, they had profited by his warnings, to keep themselves free from those heresies by which the Christian Church was so soon troubled and divided. A Church without love is withered, and shorn of her strength; but a Church without *truth* has lost the very foundation on which

alone she can rest, the very nutriment both of love and of life. In the passage which I have chosen as the subject of the present lecture, the admonitions of the apostle, which are altogether of a practical kind, have reference more directly to the conflict with unrighteousness and error which the Ephesians had to wage, than to the feelings and affections which should be cultivated by them in their intercourse with one another. But they are admonitions which are at all times needful; and the passage is so rich in meaning, that it has ever been prized most highly by those who have sought to inculcate the lessons of practical religion.

The Apostle Paul had a marvellous gift of turning everything that fell under his eye, and all the subjects of his varied and extensive knowledge, to account, for the illustration of divine truth. When he addressed the Jews, he could set before them in a light in which they had not learned to contemplate them, all the various institutions of their law. When he preached at Athens, he could quote the Greek poets to show the absurdities of their idolatry. An observer of nature, he could refer to the symmetry of the human body, to show the order that should prevail in the Church of Christ, of which He is the Head, and His people the members. And, not to enlarge upon this point, here in the text, when writing to the Ephesians, he seems to have just come from witnessing a troop of Roman soldiers passing by; and from their accoutrements and armour, he takes occasion to show what the followers of Christ must be, if they would really stand forth and perform the part of faithful soldiers of the Captain of Salvation.

Let us then turn our attention for a little to this passage; and if we can at all enter into the spirit of it, we shall find it profitable for doctrine, and reproof, and correction, and instruction in righteousness. Take first, vers. 10-12: 'Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.'

The whole passage which has been read as the text must be regarded as peculiarly important, inasmuch as the apostle makes it his parting admonition to the Ephesians. It is the winding up of the epistle, the concentration, as it were, of all the practical truths which he thought it most needful for them to keep habitually in their view. Just as when we write to our friends in any case of urgent difficulty, giving them our counsel, we mention last, even if we have repeated it before, what we judge the most indispensable thing to be done; so here, when the apostle says, 'Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord,' etc., he wishes the Ephesians to feel that if they attended to what he was now to say, and laid it to heart, all would be well. In commenting upon the verses immediately before us, I need not say much, because the leading topics which they bring under our notice, viz. the opposition which the believer has to encounter, and the sharp conflicts in which he has to be engaged, have been referred to very lately in particular discourses. But the subject concerns us all too closely to be passed over without remark. There are two special points to which it calls our attention: *first*, the general statement to show us where we may find strength; and then, *secondly*, the reason why we must avail ourselves of this strength if we would be safe, viz. the severe and desperate nature of the warfare in which as Christians we are engaged.

I. Let us attend first to the general admonition which tells us where we may find strength. 'Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might.'

It would be a vast boon to a famishing company to tell them where they could get bread and water, without money and without price. To be able to point out a place of shelter to a poor shivering creature in a winter day, where fire and lodging could be obtained freely, would be a privilege which every benevolent heart would be delighted to exercise. Or to give a poor labourer the means of renewing his strength, so that he might resume his toil with all the energy which he put forth in the morning, when he began his labour, would be a high satisfaction.

Now all these things are but images of what every believer

in Christ now enjoys, and what the apostle in the text would have us all make sure of as placed within our own reach.

But you will observe, that while he gives us the good counsel to seek our strength from Christ, and makes it very obvious that thus seeking it we shall find it, he shows most plainly in what way only it can become ours. 'Be strong *in* the Lord,' he says, indicating that while from the Lord strength comes, we must be *in* Him to have it. And what does this mean? It implies most manifestly, that we must be united to Christ before we can have the strength; that it is as true members of Him who is the living Head that we are privileged to obtain the benefit of the grace which He bestows. There is strength in Christ, everlasting, all-prevailing strength; but it is not a cry uttered in a time of difficulty that will give you the benefit of that strength. Christ must be yours by faith, and you must be His by the unreserved surrender of yourselves to Him, ere you can count upon the forthputting of His strength in your behalf. But then, while this is the thing required, most comfortable it is to know, that by being united to Christ we are made partakers of His strength, to aid us in all our spiritual conflicts. 'The power of His might,' as the apostle expresses it, that is, His almighty power, is so completely at the call of every believer in every time of difficulty, that it may be said it is not the believer, but Christ, who fights and conquers. And these are not empty words. The apostle wrote from experience, when he referred to the mighty power of Christ as forming the believer's strength. 'Most gladly will I glory in infirmities,' he says in another place, 'that the power of Christ may rest upon me.' And may *we* not most gladly take refuge under that strength. It would be a cold and comfortless saying, 'Be strong, be not afraid,' if we were left with the impression that there was no help for us but in the exertion of our own strength. But when the words run, 'Not I, but Christ in me;' 'When I am weak, then am I strong;' 'I can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me;' we learn that for a weak body there is a strong upholding arm; and for a fainting spirit there is invincible courage.

My friends, if ye are *in* Christ, ye are secure. I do not



mean that ye are secure in this way, that ye think yourselves secure. But if ye are in Christ, ye are secure; because ye will be found looking to Him, and praying that His strength may be made perfect in your weakness.

II. But we pass from this topic now to the second which the text suggests for consideration, viz. the reason why we must avail ourselves of the strength of Christ, if we would be safe, because there are obstacles and enemies in the way to eternal life, which can only be overcome by His strength. 'Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil,' etc. I only notice here in passing, because the subject will have to be more largely considered when we come to the verses which follow, that while the apostolical injunction is, that we should be strong *in* the Lord, it also calls us to personal exertion: 'Put on the whole armour of light.' The power by which we overcome is in Christ, but we must appropriate it. It becomes power for us only when by faith we cast ourselves upon its boundless resources. Hence, my friends, we must not imagine that we shall be carried to heaven without a struggle. The Scripture nowhere gives countenance to such a notion. But it *does* teach us, that when looking up to heaven in our felt weakness we implore strength, then the grace of Christ is made sufficient for us, and His strength is perfected in our weakness. But this is not the point which we have more especially to consider here. It is the account which the apostle gives of our spiritual adversaries that chiefly arrests our attention. In a general way, he alludes first to our difficulties as arising from the wiles of the devil. Subtlety has been the characteristic of all the procedure of Satan toward the human race, from the very first. 'The serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety.' It is this that renders his attacks the more dangerous. An open foe we may contend with, not without hope of success, because we can perceive what his purposes are, and can guard against them. But when we are exposed at every moment to the assaults of a foe who is never seen himself, but who makes his power be felt at all times and on every side, then we do need armour of proof to resist him, as well as constant

watchfulness. That we may be made fully sensible of this truth, the apostle proceeds to reveal to us more particularly the real extent of our danger. 'We wrestle not against flesh and blood,' he says. This does not mean that we have not to contend at all against flesh and blood. For we are subjected to that conflict in a twofold sense. If we are faithful to Christ, we must be prepared to meet the opposition of ungodly men, of which the apostle had large experience in his own history. And if we follow Christ fully, we must renounce ourselves and take up the cross, which involves a hard battle with the flesh. But what is signified in the text is, that we have not merely to fight against flesh and blood, but against enemies which are still more formidable; 'against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.' The apostle here gives us a catalogue of our spiritual enemies. He speaks in general terms, and in a general sense, therefore, can we only apprehend his meaning. But this is plain, that while Satan, the subtle arch-fiend, seeks the destruction of the human race, there are various orders of evil spirits under him, who are combined with him for the accomplishment of the same end. They have a dominion in which they are permitted by Jehovah to exert authority for a season. That dominion is called the *darkness* of this world. And who that knows anything about the abominations of heathenism in ancient Egypt and Greece and Rome, or that reads of the condition of the heathen world at the present day, will hesitate to admit that Satan's kingdom is to be found there, and that darkness is the proper description of it? Yea, and who that knows anything of his own heart will refuse to acknowledge that there is a darkness there also, a region of sinful, impure, ungodly thought and desire and affection, which has more affinity to hell than to heaven? In the world at large, then, where wickedness prevails; in heathen lands, where it is uncontrolled; in our own hearts, where there is much darkness, wicked spirits have, or seek to have, the mastery. Yea, and more than this. There is a very emphatic statement made in the end of ver. 12: 'Spiritual wickedness in high places.' The literal meaning of these words is, 'Spirits of wickedness in heavenly places.'

This passage has given rise to many different commentaries from the earliest times. It is to be regretted that the translators of the Bible did not give us 'heavenly places,' instead of 'high places.' The notion suggested by 'the spirits of wickedness in high places,' is that these wicked enemies of the human race have their abode in the air or atmosphere of this earth; and that there, unseen by us, they prosecute their schemes for our destruction. And there is some ground for this notion in the name given to Satan in another part of this epistle—'The prince of the power of the air.' But let us take the proper meaning of the expression in the text, not 'spiritual wickedness in high places,' but 'spirits of wickedness in heavenly places,' and let us ascertain what the apostle designed to say. He speaks of the 'heavenly places' in other parts of this epistle. He tells us that Christ's people, even in this world, are privileged to sit down with Him in heavenly places; that is to say, they have immediate and close and personal communion with Him. Wherever a believer is with Christ, at the communion table, in prayer, or elsewhere, there is a heavenly place. Then 'the spirits of wickedness in heavenly places' are the emissaries of Satan, endeavouring to destroy our communion with Christ, to steal the word out of our hearts, to turn our light into darkness, to rob us of the blessings which Christ holds out to our enjoyment. When, for instance, you betake yourselves to prayer, with a sincere heart, and with an earnest desire to obtain the blessings which God for Christ's sake has promised to bestow, you are in a heavenly place. And never are you more exposed to the assaults of wicked spirits than in such a place, and at such a time. All experience shows this; for there are wanderings of thought, evil suggestions, feelings which you would repress, that start up to disturb your intercourse with God, and that are to be traced to the working of some power altogether apart from the corruption of your own hearts. Now, when we think of the unspeakable importance of prayer, and of the other exercises which Christ's people find essential to their spiritual health and comfort, and to their advancement in the divine life, and of the influences which are put forth to obstruct them in all these, we need not think it strange that the apostle

should have specified 'the wicked spirits that we have to contend with in heavenly places.'

Such, then, are our adversaries as referred to in the text. They are not all enumerated; for elsewhere we read of the world, and of our own deceitful and wicked hearts, as equally requiring to be watched against. But there is enough said to teach us in what danger we are placed, and what need we have to be continually upon our guard, when Satan, with his hosts of malignant agents, is ever seeking to destroy us. Vain curiosity has been exercised for ages in speculation with reference to this subject. It was a favourite theme of study among the Jews, who endeavoured to describe the various classes of good and evil spirits, and their gradations in rank. The same absurd subject of inquiry was prosecuted very early in the Christian Church, being introduced by converts from Judaism. The Apostle Paul refers to it oftener than once in his epistles with marked condemnation; as when he says in his Epistle to the Colossians, 'Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind;' and in his first Epistle to Timothy, 'Give no heed to fables and endless genealogies' (*i.e.* the genealogies of angels), 'which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith.' I cannot help thinking that many of us imagine that we know more about angels, both holy and wicked, than we could well substantiate, from the circumstance of our carrying with us the impressions made upon our minds in early life by reading Milton's *Paradise Lost*. But if we confine ourselves to what is said in the Scripture upon the subject, we shall find that the secrets of the spiritual world, so far as they have been revealed to us, are very few, and that our wisdom is to refrain from speculating about matters which in this life we can never know. All that is to be gathered from the text, and other passages which refer to the same subject, is, that there are different orders of spiritual beings, both good and bad; and that while the good are sent to minister to them who are the heirs of salvation, the bad are always intent upon their ruin. It would not have really added to our knowledge had the Apostle Paul

been instructed by the Spirit to tell us more than he does about the angels of light and darkness. He tells us, for practical purposes, all that we need to be concerned about, when he informs us in the text that we are surrounded by unseen enemies, who are powerful, and who haunt our steps that they may make us their prey; and that even when we are occupied in the holiest work, they are on the watch to mar our designs, following us even when we would desire to be alone with Christ in heavenly places. Then, my friends, if it be so,—and we cannot doubt it, as the voice of revelation here is sufficiently plain,—the lesson which we have to learn from the subject is very obvious. We cannot see these evil spirits; we cannot be certain when and how they will assail us. But this we can do: we can endeavour prayerfully to have the avenues by which they get entrance into our heart guarded against their approach. By the cultivation of holy desires and affections, by watching over the frame of our mind and spirit, so that we seek to feel and walk in accordance with the requirements of the Word of God, we most effectually keep ourselves free from their advances. There are some people—and those especially who make profane use of the name of God, and most frequent use of the name of the devil—who profess to have no belief in the agency of evil spirits, and who laugh at the idea of temptation through their agency. Such persons we regard as in peculiar danger of sinking into everlasting ruin. It is the very completion of Satan's policy to get men to shut their eyes to the reality of his temptations, and to make them think that the wickedness they perpetrate is wholly of their own free will. But let us not be carried away by such delusion. Satan is a being who has real existence; his angels are not phantoms, but realities; and we must strive to guard against them by keeping ourselves in the fear of God, and in the love of God, and under the protection of Christ, who was manifested for this among other purposes, that He might destroy the works of the devil.

But we must now proceed to consider ver. 13: 'Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.' At the commencement of his admonition in the preceding

verses, the apostle had told the Ephesians to put on the whole armour of God; and now, after describing the enemies they had to contend with, he repeats the order. We may regard his injunction therefore as peculiarly necessary. 'Take unto you,' he says, 'the whole armour of God.' These words require a brief comment. 'The armour of God.' One very old expositor understood these words, *literally*, as signifying not merely such armour as God provides, but such armour as He uses. Recent interpreters have rejected the notion as altogether inadmissible. I do not think that it deserves to be treated so harshly. When the Son of God was manifest in the flesh, He had to contend with the powers of darkness; He did contend with them, and He overcame them. There can be no impropriety, therefore, in understanding the words of the text to signify, that in the same armour with which Christ gained the victory over Satan, His people must be clothed, that they may be victorious also. But, at the same time, as it is God who furnishes His children with all the necessary means of defence against their enemies, 'the armour of God' may be taken to signify that which He gives to fit the disciples of Christ for resisting and overcoming, even as Christ their Master resisted and overcame. But, further, we have to notice the words of the admonition, 'Take unto you the *whole* armour of God.' These words are very significant. 'The *whole* armour.' As it has been well remarked, they indicate that no partial preparation will be available for the conflict we have to wage. On all points we require to be defended, and for every point there is defence provided; therefore let us take full advantage of what God gives. According to the mode of warfare in ancient times, a soldier would have been regarded as imperfectly armed had he wanted either the helmet or the breastplate, or the sword or the shield. If he had had everything else, but wanted any one part of his equipment, he would have suffered, getting the death-blow just at the point where he was deficient. The whole armour, then, must be employed in the spiritual warfare, if we would meet our enemies successfully. We shall have to advert to this point, however, more particularly afterwards. And therefore we pass on to notice what is evidently implied in the latter

part of the verse, the desperate nature of the struggle in which believers are engaged. 'That ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.' There is an *evil day*, which must be provided against. There is no reason for supposing that the apostle refers to any particular season of trial which the Church at large or the Ephesians specially would have to encounter. 'The evil day' is the time of strong temptation, when Satan puts forth his power to draw Christ's people into his snare. It came to David when he suffered himself to be captivated by the beauty of Bathsheba. It came to Peter in the hall of the high priest, where he denied his Lord. It comes to each of us when there is a strong assault made upon us, through the lust of the flesh, or the lust of the eye, or the pride of life. Now, the apostle intimates that in this evil day we shall be so hard pressed by the enemy, that it will not be easy for us to keep our ground. When he says, 'Withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand,' he brings before us the picture of two combatants, such as Bunyan draws in Apollyon and Christian, where the conflict is deadly. Nothing will save the believer but the firm determination that, with Christ's help, he shall not give way. But with Christ's help, he will be preserved from giving way. 'Having done all' to keep his ground, and having sought the aid of his heavenly Lord, he will be enabled to keep it. And the evil day will thus be converted into a day of triumph. The practical lesson which I would enforce from this verse is founded upon the admonition to take to us the *whole* armour of God. As has been already said, if we are not equipped at every point, we shall certainly be sufferers. When there is any part of the body tender or delicate, it will be hurt by a touch which would not be felt elsewhere. So when there is any particular tendency to evil, on that point the power of temptation will be experienced. A hasty temper, if it is not watched and checked, will find fuel on every side to feed it. A proud spirit, if it is not duly regulated, will be excited every day with miserable effect. Evil desires and habits that have been subjugated, will take their ascendancy again if we are not upon our guard. So that the maxim in the text, that we endeavour to be armed

at all points, is that alone which insures our safety. And, my friends, let it not be supposed that the words of the apostle have reference only to the necessity of guarding against gross and heinous outbreakings of sin, as if all were well when we were not chargeable with these. The domain of practical religion embraces the whole frame of the inner man, as well as the outward conduct. Our aberrations from the law of God, in temper and feeling and speech, in the affairs of ordinary life, may not attract so much notice as sinful actions do, but they are not the less to be condemned on that account. The follower of Christ must be His follower in everything, exhibiting, although at best but imperfectly, the mind and feeling, as well as the course of action, which indicate likeness to Christ. 'Wherefore take unto you the *whole* armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.' Now, in the verses which follow, we have a description given of the various pieces of armour which the Christian soldier must have, if he would keep his place, or make head against the enemy. We might advert to these briefly, and overtake the whole subject in the present discourse. But it will be better to dwell for a little upon the particular points which are specified by the apostle, and to reserve for another discourse what cannot be considered at present. Look then to ver. 14: 'Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness.' The apostle speaks as if he would have the Ephesians feel that it was in right earnest that he warned them of conflict and danger. You will notice how frequently he exhorts them to *stand*, as a good commander would pass through and through the ranks, telling those who were not inured to warfare that everything depended upon their standing firm, and meeting resolutely the charge of the enemy. In ver. 11 he says, 'Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to *stand* against the wiles of the devil;' in ver. 13, 'Take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand;' and in the verse before us, '*Stand* therefore.' Surely, my friends, there is need of watchfulness, and of resolution also, on our part, when we have all these admonitions addressed to



us within so limited a space. And if we suppose that the way to eternal life is so easy that we may enter upon it at any time, and pursue it without any danger, we must be sadly mistaken. Dangers and enemies not to be overcome by a wish or a desire, were evidently in the view of the apostle when he repeated, as he does again and again, the admonition to us, *to stand*. But passing from this, let us look at the first part of the armour which he specifies: 'Having your loins girt about with truth.' The Roman soldier had a girdle about his loins, as men have when they are engaged in very hard labour, to keep the body firm and compact. We are to understand the meaning of the text, therefore, to be this: that the followers of Christ, to be fitted for their spiritual conflicts, must be fully convinced that they have *truth* upon their side, and sincere in their avowing this conviction. It is not *truth as revealed in the Word of God* that is referred to here, for that is alluded to afterwards, but it is the sincere and true conviction of your mind that Christ is trustworthy, and that in taking His side you are engaged in upholding all that is worth contending for. In other words, what the apostle enjoins here is, that we be fully satisfied of the goodness of the cause which we have espoused, and are therefore determined to prosecute it at every hazard. And if we have this conviction,—if we are thus satisfied that in following Christ we shall never have reason to be ashamed of the course on which we have entered,—we have 'our loins girt about with truth.' You will perceive, then, my friends, that we have here one great line of distinction drawn between the *nominal* and the *real* Christian,—between the man who says that he is Christ's, and the man who knows Christ experimentally as his own Saviour. It is not the knowledge of true doctrine as it is spread out before us in the Bible which forms the girdle for the loins—that is, in other words, which imparts strength to the soul in difficulty; it is the *felt* power and reality of the truth, on the strength of which a man would go to death sooner than he would deny Christ. This is the part of the spiritual armour that you perceive most prominently exhibited in the martyrs, who, for the sake of Christ and of His truth, submitted cheerfully to the cruel punishments which their savage enemies

inflicted on them. They were strengthened for their trials and for the tortures which they had to suffer by knowing in whom they believed, and being assured that He was able to keep what they had committed to Him against the great day. You will gather, I trust, from these remarks what is to be understood by the girdle of the Christian soldier. It is the firm, sincere, hearty conviction, that Christ is so precious that you will sacrifice everything rather than let go your hold of Him. The practical question then comes to be, Are we possessed of this part of the spiritual armour? Are our convictions of the preciousness and trustworthiness of Christ so deeply engraven in our hearts, that to tear them out, you must tear out our heart itself? Alas! my friends, there is great reason to fear that this cannot be affirmed with respect to very many of us. Perhaps we all admit that the Bible is the Word of God; but do we reverently and sincerely pay homage to it as such? Let the habitual neglect of it with which many are chargeable give the answer to the question. Perhaps there is not one hearing me who does not confess that Jesus Christ is the Saviour of sinners, and that through Him alone sinners can cherish the hope of eternal life. But how few are there who have chosen Him as their Saviour, and who feel that through Him they have hope toward God! I do not speak at present of that full assurance of hope which believers in Christ are invited and exhorted to attain. That may or may not be enjoyed, according to God's good pleasure, and the diligence which is used in seeking after it. But, unquestionably, the man cannot be a Christian who has not given his heart to Christ, and who does not honestly and sincerely prize Him above all earthly good. Look well therefore, my friends, to the state of your own feelings toward Christ. See if He is truly precious to you. Seek to have the question settled, if you really have an interest in Him. For if, in the midst of the temptations to which you are exposed, you have nothing else to sustain you than a mere profession, you will be overcome, because your loins are not girt about with truth.

In conclusion, I would leave this remark with you, drawn from the whole subject which we have had before us: that if you

would stand fast and retain your integrity amid the trials of the Christian life, you must keep up close intercourse with Christ Himself. The powers of darkness will try to interrupt it. They will suggest doubts and fears and imaginary difficulties, to drive you away from the Saviour. But rest you upon this foundation, 'I will believe Christ rather than the wicked one ; and He has said, that whosoever believeth in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life.' Amen.

## XXXI.

### THE CORRUPT NATURE WARRING AGAINST THE SPIRITUAL LIFE.

‘ I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man : but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am ! who shall deliver me from the body of this death ? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God ; but with the flesh the law of sin.’—ROM. VII. 21-25.

THESE verses formed part of the passage which was briefly commented on last Sabbath. But, as it was then observed, it is impossible by a few passing remarks to do any justice to such weighty sentences as we have in the Epistle to the Romans ; and therefore I have selected these words to make them the subject of closer examination, and to extract and enforce some of the important lessons which they teach. It may be well, however, before we go further, to glance briefly at the preceding verses, that we may carry along with us a clear conception of the apostle’s meaning. The bearing of his statements in the beginning of the chapter, and down to ver. 6, is very obvious. He presses two great truths upon our notice : First, that in our natural estate, as subjected to the authority of the law of God, which we cannot in any respect fully obey, we are unable to render God any right service ; so that the whole life is a life of sin. ‘ When we were in the flesh,’ he says (ver. 5), ‘ the motions of sins which were by the law,’—that is, our sinful desires and appetites, which the law revealed, and which were the more violent because of the restraint which the law sought to impose upon them,—‘ did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death.’ But then, secondly, as the married woman is freed from the obligation of the law of marriage by the death of her husband, even

so believers in Christ are freed from the penalty of the law, and from obedience to it, as the ground on which they have to seek for eternal life, in virtue of the satisfaction which He has rendered to it by His obedience unto death. United to Christ, they obtain all the benefits of His atonement. United to Him, they stand in a new position, in which they are dead to the law, *i.e.* delivered from its obligation as a covenant of life, and the law is dead to them as having lost its power to condemn them; and thus, under the influence of love and gratitude, they are disposed to serve God more fully, more cheerfully, and with far higher satisfaction, than they could do when their service was exacted from them by fear. This is the meaning of ver. 4, where the apostle says, 'Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to Him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God.'

Then, in the verses 7-13, he goes on to speak particularly of the effects produced by the law, where it is faithfully used. In itself, 'it is holy, and just, and good;' but it is the great instrument by which sinners are convinced of their sinfulness in the sight of God, and of their lost estate by nature. If there were no law, there would be no transgression; and while men overlook the authority and spirituality of the law, they live at peace with themselves, in a state of self-satisfaction. But when they come to measure themselves honestly by the divine requirements, then they learn how fearfully they have transgressed, and feel that they are subject to the penalty of death. As in ver. 9, 'I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died.' This does not in the slightest degree affect the excellency of the law. It was not *designed* to produce death. On the contrary, its language originally was, 'Do this, and live.' But sin, standing up in opposition to it, and braving its authority, brings death upon the sinner. Yet, at the same time, where there is really a work of grace in the heart, the consciousness of guilt, and the feeling that the sentence of death is incurred, are accompanied with an acknowledgment of the rectitude of the law, and deep humiliation on account of sin as the greatest

of evils. And so the apostle says, in ver. 13, 'Was then that which is good made death unto me?' By no means. 'But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful.' Now, with regard to the concluding verses of this chapter, from ver. 14 to the end, there has been no little controversy. The point disputed is, whether we are to consider them as expressive of the experience of the apostle himself after his conversion, and with him of those who truly believe in Christ; or whether they should not rather be regarded as having reference to the unconverted, and as descriptive of the conflict which they have to wage, between the power of conscience, which upholds the authority of the divine law, upon the one hand, and their own corrupt propensities, which rise up in rebellion against the law, upon the other. It is urged by those who take this last view, and who suppose that these verses can only refer to the unconverted, that there are some statements in them inconsistent with what is elsewhere said of those who are under the power of grace, and more especially of such an one as the apostle himself. Thus, for example, it is asked, How could any converted man say, and how could Paul say (ver. 14), 'We know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin'? And again, How could he say (ver. 18), 'I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me; but how to perform that which is good I find not'? And again, How could he say (ver. 24), 'O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?' Are not these the confessions and groanings of the unregenerate when they are brought into close contact with the demands of God's holy law, and compelled to look its awful penalty full in the face, rather than acknowledgments which could properly be uttered by those in whom the Spirit of God dwells, and who have been freed from the bondage of sin? These questions appear to be plausible enough, but then, on a survey of the whole passage, they are sufficiently answered by other declarations contained in it. Thus, for instance, no unrenewed man could say, as in ver. 22, 'I delight in the law of God after the inward man;' or, as in ver. 25, 'I thank God through Jesus

Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God ; but with the flesh the law of sin.' These sentiments are altogether at variance with the views which the unconverted hold of the law, with the relation in which they stand to Christ, and with the general tenor of their life. For the carnal mind is enmity against God : it is not subject to His law, neither indeed can be. It rejects Christ ; and all its movements are *really* sinful.

But it is not necessary at present to enter into any formal argument, for the purpose of showing that the whole of this very striking passage gives an account of the experience of the apostle himself, and of all who, like him, have been born of the Spirit. It may suffice to say, that while there is not one of Christ's real followers who will not admit the accuracy of the description, with reference to his own spiritual condition and feelings, there is much in it which cannot, with any semblance of truth, be applied to the unconverted. The only real, or at least the principal, difficulty which lies against the interpretation which we regard as the right one, is found in ver. 14 : ' For we know that the law is spiritual : but I am carnal, sold under sin.' Now in one sense the believer in Christ is not *carnal*, for he is not in the flesh, but in the spirit. But in another sense he may well say, ' I am carnal,' inasmuch as he has not obtained, and will not in this world obtain, complete deliverance from that corruption of nature which he inherits from Adam. Every day he is made sensible, and often bitterly sensible, of the remaining strength of that corruption ; so that when others, looking at him, would pronounce him a holy man, he himself, knowing the plagues of his own heart, would say, ' I am carnal, sold under sin.'

But now, having thus referred to preliminaries, let me proceed to consider the verses which more especially form the subject of the present discourse. Look first at ver. 21 : ' I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me.'

It would only tend to obscure the truth if I were to refer particularly to the different ways in which this verse has been interpreted. The proper meaning of it will suggest itself at once to any humble and intelligent reader of the Bible. The

apostle had been describing in the foregoing context the conflict, of which he had daily experience in himself, between the remaining power of the old corrupt nature and the tendencies and strivings of the new spiritual nature after holiness. And he gives us here the summary of his experience: 'I find operating within me a principle which has the force of a law, and which has this tendency, that when I would do good, it makes evil to be present with me.'

This is a melancholy and humbling experience. We are not to suppose, however, that the apostle, in making this statement, would have it understood that it was *invariably* so with him; and that, in every instance, when his will was exerted in the way of well-doing, he was absolutely prevented from accomplishing his purpose, and drawn away into positive sin, by the power of the corruption which still adhered to him. What he means is evidently this, that, in all his endeavours to serve and glorify God by obedience to His law, the principle of corruption so interfered with his efforts, that he could not do anything as *he wished* to do it; that he was so restrained and confined through the influence of indwelling sin, that it seemed as if sin pervaded his whole life, and tainted all his actions, even the best of them.

And is this an exaggerated account of his condition as a converted and spiritually minded man? It may appear to be so to those who think of obedience as consisting merely in submission to the law in the outward conduct. But let any one who really loves and fears God, and desires to serve Him, form a purpose, any one morning of his life, to repress all sinful influences, and to set such a guard upon feeling, and temper, and word, and action, throughout the day, as that there shall be no cause for regret or repentance in the evening; and of this we feel confident, that if the work of self-examination is faithfully performed at night, the language of the text will embody the experience of such an one as we have supposed: 'I find a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me.'

But then, it may be said, if this be a true account of the Christian life, the power of grace must be very inefficient, and the feelings of believers in Christ must be very depressed



and gloomy. I would reply that neither the one nor the other conclusion can be rightly drawn from what has been advanced. First, the power of grace is not *inefficient* because it does not all at once destroy and eradicate the natural depravity of the heart. When it imparts a desire and an ability to resist evil, and to get the victory over it, its influence is real and manifest. Although the corruption of the heart, like a river confined by an embankment, still presses at every point, and seeks for itself an outlet, yet it is confined and restrained ; and the reality of a gracious work is exhibited even at the very time when the believer says, ' Evil is present with me.'

And further, neither is the Christian life altogether *gloomy* because of the prevalence of indwelling sin. This does indeed cast many a shade over it, and causes many a bitter pang. As the apostle says, ' We that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened.' But there are gleams of hope which break through the gloom ; and there is the sense of reconciliation and peace with God through Jesus Christ, which, though it may not be always vividly experienced, yet *lives* in the heart of the believer, and sustains him amid his conflicts with sin. Sin is present, but it does not *rule*. It gains many victories, and mars many noble purposes, but it does not hold the mastery. Where it abounds, grace abounds much more.

If one were to draw a picture of the life of faith upon the ground which is furnished by the words, ' I find a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me,' he might obtain materials for his sketch in many parts of the Old Testament. There could not, for instance, be many better illustrations of the truth presented to us in the text than this, that there were left in the land of Canaan many hostile tribes, as the Philistines and others, who were to be to the Israelites ' as pricks in their eyes, and thorns in their sides, to vex them in the land wherein they dwelt.' The Israelites possessed the land ; the promise took effect in securing this for them, just as grace reigns over sin ; but then there were troubles and hostile outbreakings from time to time, showing that the land of Canaan was not an undisturbed and perfect rest, just as the relics of corruption which cleave to and harass the people of

God, show that they must seek their proper home and their full blessedness beyond the grave.

But there may be another illustration taken from Old Testament history, equally significant, but more encouraging. We read, 2 Sam. iii. 1 : ‘There was long war between the house of Saul and the house of David : but David waxed stronger and stronger, and the house of Saul waxed weaker and weaker.’ Take this as an image of the conflict that is waged between grace and corruption. It continues, the mutual hostility being always exhibited, and sometimes there being a sharp onset at a particular point ; but the general result is the weakening of corruption and the strengthening of the principles of grace in the renewed soul, and there is complete victory in the end.

Upon the whole, then, my friends, we see that grace has the predominance in the converted man. His *desires* are drawn over to the side of what is good and pleasing to God. But he is still subjected to trials from *within*, as well as from without,—to such trials that he scarcely knows sometimes whether he can venture to say that he has escaped from the dominion of sin at all. The psalmist says, in one place, ‘My soul cleaveth to the dust ;’ thus virtually expressing the same sentiment as the apostle does in the text. But this was not the general frame or habit of his soul. On the contrary, he rejoiced to run in the path of the divine commandments. It was only the power of indwelling sin that clogged and weakened him for a time. And hence I would say to those who may be deeply exercised by the rising of sin in their heart, that they must not sink into despondency, as if any strange thing had happened to them. They are but suffering the penalty common to all Christ’s followers, as partakers of a corrupt nature. They must fight on, therefore, looking forward with good hope to the time when the mortal shall put on immortality, and the corrupt incorruption.

Look now to vers. 22–24 : ‘For I delight in the law of God after the inward man : but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am ! who shall deliver me from the

body of this death?’ Here we have the sentiment which was expressed in the previous verse amplified and made more clear. The apostle, as it were, anticipates an objection that might be raised to his statement, that he felt the influence of indwelling sin to be so powerful, that when he would do good, evil was present with him;—an objection to this effect: ‘How is it possible that a spiritual man should be in such condition?’ And he answers the objection, not by attempting to smooth down the difficulty that was felt, but just by a more emphatic declaration of the truth objected to. He separates more distinctly the points which he had before stated, and considers each of them more fully by itself. His meaning, in the form of a paraphrase, would run thus: ‘Do not suppose, when I say that when I would do good, evil is present with me, that I give countenance to the notion that sin prevails as much in the children of God as in His enemies. For, borne down as I feel myself to be by corruption, I delight in the law of God after the inward man. Yet I cannot conceal it from myself, that it is in the midst of a fierce struggle that I make any progress in the divine life; for I seem ever to be subject to the influence of two opposing forces, the one of which would draw me upward, while the other seeks to drag me down again; and thus, when I think of my own weakness, I am sometimes nearly constrained to give up all for lost.’

This is the general import of the passage. But let us look at it more particularly.

‘I delight in the law of God after the inward man.’ *The inward man* here does not mean the *understanding* merely, but the *renewed mind*; the intellect and reason enlightened and influenced by the Spirit of God. No man destitute of the Holy Spirit delights in the divine law, or, taking that expression in the widest sense, *in the Word of God*.

There are some parts of it, indeed, which even infidels are compelled to admire. There are chapters in the books of the prophets which dissolute men, who are gifted with taste and imagination, read with pleasure, and speak of with rapture. Deists and Unitarians have professed their extreme satisfaction with such passages of the New Testament as Christ’s Sermon

on the Mount, and generally with the history of His life as given by the evangelists.

But is this what the apostle means by delighting in the law of God? Assuredly no. What he means is this, that the true disciple of Christ takes the Word of God into his hand with reverence that he may hear what God says to him; and more particularly, that even when he reads the precepts of the law, and the spiritual illustration and enforcement of these precepts given by prophets and apostles, and by the Lord Jesus Himself, he *takes pleasure* in the study of them. They reveal to Him the deceitfulness and desperate wickedness of his own heart; but he loves them not the less on that account. He feels that they are *good*, because they come from God. He loves them, because he loves Christ, by whom they are enforced. To reach that perfect standard is his aim. He tries, but cannot accomplish it. He confesses that God does not require too much; while he feels that he cannot come up to the requirement. Yet he does not reject the law, although he is unable to fulfil any one of its precepts as he ought to do: 'he delights in it after the inward man.'

Now, my friends, I would ask you particularly to consider this point. There are many marks and evidences whereby it may be known whether a man is in a state of grace or not. Some of these may be doubtful; as, for example, the measure of spiritual peace and joy which one experiences, or the apparent relish which he exhibits for the ordinances and means of grace. There may be a false peace; a joy which has no solid foundation; and a respect for ordinances which is more the result of habit than of deliberate choice, and which has no connection with spirituality of mind. But when a man really loves the Word of the Lord, and makes it his study, and finds satisfaction in it; more especially, when he delights in the precepts which it enforces, and counts them excellent even when he feels that they condemn himself; and when he is found striving to obey them, not that he may in this way obtain a title to eternal life, but because Christ commands him to obey; then I say that he affords evidence that he has been renewed in the spirit of his mind. Look where you will throughout the Scripture, and you find this the characteristic of all God's

children, that they delighted in His law. Enoch walked with God—that was, in the way of His law. Noah was perfect in his generation, walking with God—that is, walking according to His law. Abraham, strong in the faith, was obedient to the law, going wherever the word of God commanded him. Job was an upright man, fearing God, and eschewing evil; *i.e.*, in other words, delighting in the law of the Lord. David says, ‘O how I love Thy law! it is my meditation all the day.’ Jeremiah says, ‘Thy words were found, and I did eat them, and they were sweeter than honey to my taste.’ But what need I say more? Let us all try ourselves by this standard: What are the views which we hold with respect to the requirements of God’s law? If we count them burdensome; if we would gladly get rid of them; if we are satisfied with the endeavour to yield such obedience to them as will not interfere with our most loved pursuits and pleasures; then it is too evident that we have no real relish for the law, and no true respect for the sovereign Lawgiver. But if, on the other hand, with all our acknowledged imperfection, we still feel that God’s precepts are, in themselves, excellent and holy; and if we continue to strive to obey them more and more, while we are sensible that we can never perfectly honour and fulfil them; then this shows that we have one mark of resemblance to Christ, and are of the same spirit with Him; for He says of Himself, ‘Thy law, O God, is within my heart.’

But we have now to inspect the darker part of the apostle’s statement in the text. In explanation of the words, ‘When I would do good, evil is present with me,’ he says, ver. 23, ‘I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.’ The body exercises a certain influence over the mind. There are certain desires and appetites which we call bodily or fleshly, because they form part of our mere animal nature. These are called by the apostle here, ‘the law of sin which is in our members.’ Conscience and reason, even unaided by divine grace, contend against these fleshly appetites, so that there is a struggle in the unrenewed man between the nobler and the baser principles of his nature. Some of the old heathen writers describe this

struggle very forcibly, lamenting the power of their evil propensities, and confessing how often these got the victory over reason. And those among us who are strangers to the grace of God, are, in like manner, subjected to a warfare between conscience and sinful desire, which is often accompanied with much mental suffering; so that the words of the text might be quoted as descriptive of *their* experience. But *these* words point to a more serious and important warfare. The Spirit of God, when He quickens those who were dead in sin, leads them to count sin hateful, and to aim at obtaining complete emancipation from its power. The influence of the Spirit, in enlightening and strengthening them, and prompting them to prosecute this highest of all achievements, is called in the text, '*The law of the mind.*' It is not the natural reason and understanding, even when they are most thoroughly cultivated, that get this name. It is the grace of the Spirit, moving and controlling the mind, which forms what is here designated *the law of the mind*. But then, as in the case of the unrenewed, so in the case of the converted, the body, the animal nature, with its lusts and appetites, puts forth a power in opposition to the principle of grace. We know, indeed, that the quickening power of the Spirit reaches to the body as well as to the soul; and that, therefore, the influence of fleshly desires is broken down where grace reigns. But still the root of all these sinful desires and appetites remains; and still they war against the soul, more or less successfully in proportion to the degree of watchfulness, and the earnestness of prayer, with which they are resisted. Now, what the believer in Christ desires, is not merely to be able to keep them in such subjection that they shall not draw him into open sin, but to be *altogether* delivered from their influence. He would meditate upon the truths of God's Word, but his meditations are disturbed by some train of worldly thought. He would pray, but while He prays his mind often wanders after vanity. He would banish all evil desires from his heart, but ere he is aware they press in upon him and displace the good. This is the kind of troubled scene through which the believer has to pass, when, as the apostle says, 'the law that is in the members wars against the law of the mind, and

brings him into captivity to the law of sin which is in his members.' And then sometimes the evil actually prevails; grace lies for a season vanquished by sin; and the conviction of this gives occasion to the bitter cry, 'O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?'

Much more might be said in connection with this part of the subject, but I must pass on to consider for a few moments ver. 25. 'I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.' Here, first, the apostle conducts us into the comfortable and safe refuge which he had found in his own case available, when the pressure of sin lay heavy upon his conscience. He seems, in the latter part of ver. 24, to be in the condition of a man who felt himself so encompassed by troubles that it was almost vain for him to hope for deliverance. But this is only a momentary depression. He looks out of his prison-house, and sees Christ, whose mercy he had experienced before, stretching out His hand kindly toward him. And then, although sin is not presently destroyed, he yet sees how he may escape finally from its dominion. Like one who has to flee for his life from a burning house, and who makes his escape with difficulty, and whose first words are, 'Thanks be to God for the deliverance,' the apostle exclaims, 'I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord.'

It is interesting to mark the coincidence between the spiritual experiences of God's people. The words of the text remind us of the psalmist's words in Psalm cxlii.: 'When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then Thou knewest my path. In the way wherein I walked have they privily laid a snare for me. I looked on my right hand, and beheld, but there was no man that would know me: refuge failed me; no man cared for my soul. I *cried* unto Thee, O Lord: I said, Thou art my refuge and my portion in the land of the living.' Here we see the Old Testament believer in his trouble, when he felt himself utterly helpless, looking to the Lord; and so we also see the apostle casting his burden upon Christ. And, my friends, it must be so with *us*, if we would

pass through the wilderness of this world in safety and reach the promised rest. Every day we must carry our sin to Christ, who alone can free us from the guilt of it. And in the midst of our temptations, in our darkest hours, when we feel most our own impotency, we must look to Him. Thus we get freedom and safety. 'They looked unto Him, and were lightened: and their faces were not ashamed. This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles.' But still the old corrupt nature cleaves to God's children while they are in this world. More and more weakened the power of it is, but still it is *there*. The spiritual nature, indeed, is nourished and strengthened by Him who gave it, and it advances toward maturity; but it is all the while in the midst of a conflict. So that the apostle leaves this with us as the description of the believer's earthly state: 'With the mind he serves the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.'

Now there are some practical lessons which I would draw from the whole subject we have surveyed. These would be very numerous if we were to give them all; but we must be contented with stating one or two of the most prominent.

1. In the first place, let this be noticed, that God's people, as well as others, need to be humbled on account of sin. They carry about with them that corruption which mars their best-intentioned services, and renders necessary the purifying efficacy of atoning blood to make them acceptable. How miserable, then, is the condition of the self-righteous! They suppose that they can do something to merit God's favourable regard. What can they do? Are their prayers such as they should be? Are any of their acts of obedience such as will bear the scrutiny of the Searcher of the heart? Ah, no! Let them take home to them the words of the holy psalmist: 'If Thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquity, who, O Lord, could stand?'

2. In the second place, all true believers in Christ, while they are subject to the influence of a corrupt nature, do yet live *habitually* under a higher influence. The spiritual life is a *reality*. All who are Christ's delight in the law of God



after the inward man. Most of them have to labour in the transaction of the ordinary business of life, and are subject to all the trials and vexations which are connected with such business. But this does not destroy their spirituality. There is an *inner* life, the life of the soul with God; so that a man can be a Christian, and can be exercised as a Christian, while he is engaged in any lawful calling, however mean.

3. In the third place, let it not be supposed, that because we feel ourselves engaged in a conflict with evil, and have experience of something like the flesh warring against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh, we are therefore like God's children. Something more is necessary that we may have a place among them, viz. that our *desire* and *honest* effort be on the side of God's law. The *conflict* itself does not prove that we are converted. The real proof lies in our getting more and more the victory over sin.

4. In the fourth and last place, there is no outlet to any of us from our difficulties, but through Jesus Christ. As the divine life begins with the acceptance of Him, so throughout its whole continuance it is nourished by Him, and it ends in Him. He is the author and finisher of our faith. Christ is our life. Then let us cleave close to Him. Amen.

## XXXII.

### A NEW-YEAR'S DAY SERMON.

‘Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not? hearken diligently unto me, and eat ye that which is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness. Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.’—ISA. LV. 2, 3.

**I**F a man could separate himself for a short season from all personal concern with the world in which we live, and, as a mere spectator of what is passing in it, survey the busy scene which it presents; and if he could, at the same time, penetrate the covering that conceals the thoughts and feelings of one man from another; what a strange history would he be able to lay before us, of apparent activity, where there was really none,—of outward success, accompanied with inward disappointment,—of reputed wisdom, where all was folly,—of seeming happiness and enjoyment, where discontent and envy and remorse were drinking up the very life-blood of their victims! And if, besides, the spectator of this scene of strange anomalies were gifted with the power of looking into the world beyond the grave, and marking the connection between the course of the present life and that which follows, when the dark abyss of death has made the separation, what still more strange and appalling discoveries would he be able to unfold to us! What a difference would be exhibited between the estimate which this world forms of happiness, and reputation, and prudence, and *general* worth, and that which is formed in the other world, to which, willing or unwilling, we are all approaching! The coin which passes current in one land is rejected as of no value in another, where a different sovereign and different laws are recognised. So it is as to this world

and the next. What is called happiness, and is stamped as such, on this side of the gulf that separates between these two territories, may be found to be misery upon the other side. What is good reputation *here*, may be infamy upon the other side. And the *world's* prudence and worth may be impassable coin in the land to which death will soon bring us. Nay, we need not speak of these things as mere *possibilities*. We need not form the supposition of an imaginary spectator, looking through the dark void that forms the boundary between time and eternity, and telling us what a contrast there is between the things that are reckoned of value on that side and on this. The Word of God places every one who reads it in a position from which, looking down, he may not only behold and estimate aright the transactions of men in the present life, but from which he may also descry what is passing in the other world, and how the procedure of each one of us here is to affect his destiny hereafter. Let us just for a moment take up the position to which the Bible raises us, and with *it* in our hand, to interpret what we see; let us look at human life as it is exhibited before us *in time*, and as the unerring word tells us it will be viewed and judged *in eternity*.

First of all, observe that large assemblage bent on self-indulgence, and living as if they had been sent into the world for no other end than to gratify the desires and inclinations of the fleshly mind. It is in vain that they are admonished to flee from the wrath to come, and that the truths of the Word of God are brought to bear upon them, telling them that the end of all these things is death. They will persist in bursting through every barrier that is erected to restrain them, and in enjoying themselves, as they term it, at every hazard. Sometimes, indeed, you will perceive a few of them arrested for a moment by the announcements of the faithful word, and giving no doubtful indications that they feel themselves in an unsafe state, and that they have no solid peace and comfort. But it is only for a moment. The slightest breath of temptation dispels every serious reflection, and they again suffer themselves to be led captive by Satan at his will. Outwardly, and when you judge merely from their looks, you would pronounce them, upon the whole, to be among the happy, for

every caprice, every passing humour, they have the means of gratifying. But there are many little inlets of misery which your eye cannot perceive ; and when the course of life is run, and the Bible is taken as giving the verdict upon their condition in eternity, how terrible is the picture it exhibits ! You have it placed before you more forcibly in the simple language of one of the Saviour's parables, than it could be if every horror that imagination could conjure up were employed to give effect to it. When the rich man besought Abraham to send Lazarus, that he might dip the tip of his finger in water and cool his tongue, the answer was, 'Remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things : but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.' 'Thou receivedst thy good things on earth :' what fearful words, when all the concerns of earth were past, and there remained nothing for the condemned sensualist but unchangeable and unmitigated anguish ! Look forward, ye that are carnally minded and live after the flesh ; look forward, and observe what is the destiny that awaits you. You have your good things in your lifetime. They *are good*, if they were rightly enjoyed and improved. Your bodily health, your relish and appetite for your pleasures, are good things. The opportunities and means which, in the divine providence, you are furnished with, of surrounding yourselves with comforts, are also in themselves good things. But if, with all these good things about you, you forget God, and reject the offer of pardon and reconciliation which He makes to you through Jesus Christ His Son, with the present lifetime your good will terminate ; and when you look back from the changeless eternity, into which you must enter, it will be to re-echo the words of the prophet in the text, 'We spent our strength for that which was not bread, and our labour for that which could not satisfy.'

But again, leaving the votaries of sensuality, turn your eyes to the vast multitudes that spend their life in frivolity and vain show, as if they had been sent into the world for no other end than to pass through it in folly and merriment. The Bible maxim, 'Take no thought for the morrow,' is literally the rule of their conduct, although in a sense very different

from that which it was intended to convey. With utter recklessness of the future, with an indifference even to the common duties of life which is inexplicable, they spend their time; never happy but when they are in some scene of gaiety and amusement. But are they happy then? it may be asked. And does the smiling face form a true index to the feelings of the mind within? Nay; perhaps you will not find in any assemblage of human beings, hearts more ill at ease, and charged with all those passions of envy and jealousy and pride which drive all real comfort to a distance, than in those assemblages so graphically described by the prophet, when he says, 'The harp, and the viol, the tabret, and pipe, and wine, are in their feasts; but they regard not the work of the Lord, neither consider the operation of His hands.' Oh, what an expenditure of strength and activity there is for no end at all in the haunts of vanity; and what fatigue and exhaustion follow where no labour has been performed! The man who toils from morning to night for his daily bread, does not return from his work in the evening with a frame half so exhausted—the missionary who travels through dreary wastes, publishing his great Master's message, does not lay himself down to rest so fatigued with the labours of his mission, as these poor children of pleasure do from what they call the enjoyments of an evening. One would be disposed, looking only at present results, to write over the doors of the haunts of pleasure, 'They spend their strength for that which is not bread, and their labour for that which satisfieth not.' But when we look, through the Bible, at the eternal issues of all these things, we are constrained to feel that even this language is too tame. There is no sound of the harp and the viol where lost souls are congregated. The Word says, 'There is weeping, and wailing, and gnashing of teeth.' Do I say these things as if the book of God required us to look with a stern eye upon every form of human enjoyment, and to denounce it? No; God would have His creatures happy; and His Word is given to tell them how they may be made truly happy. But what is this happiness which we all seek for?

I ask at the man who mourns for the loss of a friend, or relative, very dear to him, When and how would you have

wished that relative to die, the choice of place and time being left to you, while the event was certain ? Would it have been in the place of amusement ? Would it have been in the ball-room ? No, you would say : where prayer could be offered up ; for a man should die within reach of the sound of prayer. But that sound could not be heard in either of these places. My brethren, would you have your friends to pass from time to eternity from the place of gaiety or from the place of prayer ? Parents, would you have your children torn from you sporting among their toys, although that might well be, or in the midst of more solemnizing exercises ? Friends and brethren, if death were to come into your families, what is it that would make the visit endurable ? Only the thought, that those taken from you were with Jesus. Then live ye as ye would have your friends die. Live with Jesus. Never go where you cannot take Him with you. Never engage in that which His Word condemns. Always countenance what *His* Word approves of ; and thus there will be no spending of your strength for that which is not bread, nor of your labour for that which does not satisfy.

Once more, cast your eyes upon that other assemblage, of which each individual is labouring more actively than another in the pursuit of riches, as if that were the only good worthy of the regard of an immortal being. Oh, what anxiety and care, and what ceaseless toil, are undergone in that pursuit ; and how many lives are sacrificed in the vain attempt to acquire that which, after all, in many cases, must be left to others to enjoy ! We speak sometimes of the heroic self-denial of the missionary, who, for the glory of Christ and the love of souls, is contented to forego all the comforts of home and kindred, and brave the dangers of an unhealthy climate, and the opposition of barbarous tribes, in proclaiming that gospel which is the comfort and the joy of his own heart. But, in sober earnestness, it may be said, although in a different sense, that there is more self-denial practised, and greater sacrifices made, by the men of the world in their endeavours to become rich, than by the most devoted followers of Christ in their efforts to extend His kingdom. The greatest earthly hazard a man can run is that of life. The self-devoted missionary holds not his

life dear to him, that he may finish his course with joy, and testify the gospel of the grace of God. And how many are there who, tempted by the *idol gold*, are willing, like him, to expatriate themselves, and to subject themselves to toils and privations in a foreign land, as great and as dangerous as his, for no other end than that they may return again with large fortune, and enjoy themselves as they please! Now, they do it that they may obtain worldly comfort and reputation; but he, that he may save lost souls, increase the number of heaven's inhabitants, and advance the Redeemer's honour. If, then, you look on self-denial as the renouncing of present ease, and the restraining of present desire, that some future good may be accomplished, we hold that the worldling is in his own way a more self-denied man than even the Christian missionary. For he makes the very same kind of sacrifices for objects that are infinitely less important; he risks life itself for things that perish in the using, yea, for that which he may never realize. Verily in such cases it may be said with truth, 'The people walk in a vain show; they spend their strength for that which is not bread.'

My friends, let us look at this matter in the light in which the Bible places it before us. You will remember the well-known passage: 'They that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.' In the bitter experience of many, the truth stated in this passage has been realized, and increasing sorrow has been the concomitant of increasing wealth. 'He gave them their desire,' it is said, with reference to the Israelites; 'but He sent leanness into their soul.'

Even admitting, however, that wealth is gained and all the temporal comforts which it can purchase, and that life is protracted to the utmost verge in the enjoyment of this wealth, God being forgotten all the while, and His offers of mercy despised, what advantage has the rich man, when he comes to grapple with death, above the poorest man that breathes? The world's wealth could not bribe the last enemy to stay his hand.

A thousand worlds would not suffice as the ransom of that soul which is about to pass to the judgment. Money may purchase good wishes and benedictions, but the Spirit of God and the blood of atonement are not bought with money. A man may leave behind him all that he has acquired for purposes of charity and philanthropy, and much may be said when he is gone of his kind and tender heart. But it is not with corruptible things, as silver and gold, that men can have dealings with their Maker. It is in virtue of the efficacy of the precious blood of Christ, and that alone, that any of the human family can find acceptance with Him. And if this is not found, not because of any defect in the means by which it may be obtained, not because the work of Christ has lost any of its value by the lapse of time, but because sinners will have salvation in their own way and not in God's way—I say, if this is not found, is not everything lost? Men may live without Christ, but they cannot die without Him and be safe. They may contrive indeed to live, and they may die wealthy, honoured, respectable; but one would rather be the poor beggar Lazarus than the rich man. Who would not follow Christ in the midst of poverty and tribulation and varied suffering here, rather than be excluded from the light of His countenance hereafter? Who will not acknowledge that men who have to exist for ever, should rather live for eternity than for time? Come with us to the deathbed of the man of wealth, who has lived without God in the world, but who thinks that he has made some compensation for a godless life by the charities that are to be dispensed after he has been torn away. Would you not say that 'he spent his strength for that which was not bread, and his labour for that which did not satisfy'? I might, in like manner, particularize other classes to whom the words of the prophet here are equally applicable; but I must pass on to consider for a little the particular topics which the language of the text suggests for our consideration. You will observe that there is, first, an invitation here addressed to us by Jehovah, to hearken diligently to Him; to incline our ear, and to come to Him. And then, secondly, there are reasons assigned wherefore we should at once close with this invitation; and these are twofold, viz.



what we shall gain if we do embrace the invitation, and what we shall lose if we reject it. We shall gain everything that is most desirable ; we shall be put in possession of that which is good ; our soul shall delight itself in fatness ; yea, life itself is involved in the transaction, for the words run, ' Hear, and your *soul shall live.*' And then, upon the other hand, if we reject the invitation, we shall be fearful losers ; for even besides forfeiting all the good that has been mentioned, we shall make shipwreck of everything that appears to us at present to be desirable ; we shall find that we have *been spending* our money for that which is not bread, and our labour for that which satisfieth not. Let us then glance at these topics, since the time will not permit of our doing more.

I. You have here an invitation addressed to you by Jehovah Himself, to hearken diligently unto Him, to incline your ear, and to come to Him.

There is something peculiarly touching in the invitations of the Word of God, which, if men would but pause and reflect, we think could not fail to make an impression upon their hearts. Just look for a moment at this one, and then say if you are prepared to resist it. The Lord that formed the ear would have possession of it for an instant. 'Hearken diligently unto me,' He says ; 'incline your ear.' He would take you, as it were, each one separately by himself, and reason and counsel with you. The matters of which He would treat with you are too important to be handled in a crowd, too sacred to be discussed amid the noise and bustle of worldly avocations. He has therefore sent us to you this day, bearing a message to you, that He would rather speak with you aside and in a whisper, than aloud and in any place where the conference would attract attention. Yes, my friends, this is His message ; and if we could put our hand upon the shoulder of every hearer, we would say, 'Jehovah desires to have a word with you alone ; He would speak to you by yourself : hearken diligently unto Him ; incline your ear.'

Do you dread a conference with the Holy One ? It must be held sooner or later. We must all appear before Him, and hear His voice. The dead that are in their graves shall hear

the voice of the Son of God, and shall come forth. And the same omnipotent word that breaks the slumber of the dead shall be heard by each of us at the judgment, saying either, 'Come unto me, ye blessed, inherit the mansions prepared for you from the foundation of the world;' or, 'Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire.' But it is not with that voice that Jehovah would now address you in this His private conference. From His own Word we can certify this, that if He would have you turn aside to speak with Him *now*, it is to hear the voice of affection and of entreaty. Yea, I can even tell you, from what is recorded in His Word, the substance of the address which He desires to whisper in your ear. 'Poor sinner,' He would say, 'thou hast destroyed thyself, but in me is thine help. Thou liest under the condemnation of the law; thou art in bondage under the power of the wicked one; thou art all helpless, diseased, and loathsome. Thou art pursuing a course which will soon terminate in irremediable misery. Thy friends, as they call themselves, would have thee put off the evil day, and be of good courage, as all will yet be well. They would have thee use all the means of enjoyment which are yet within thy reach. They would have thee laugh at scruples of conscience, and fears of death, and images of terror beyond the grave. But listen not to their reasonings; be not moved by their ridicule. Even if they keep close by thee till death come, they must leave thee alone then to meet thy Judge. Reject therefore their counsels. Thou art not happy in thy present state. A slight attack of sickness makes thee tremble. What wilt thou do in the dark valley that lies before thee? Hearken then to me, and receive the remedy which will be effectual for all the fears and diseases and troubles of thy soul. Look hither; look to Jesus. Thou art fearfully polluted by sin, but the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin. Thou deservest to die; but Christ died that such as thou art might have life. Thou deservest a place in the lowest part of the abyss of misery; but if thou wilt believe in Christ, thou shalt have a place in the highest heaven.'

It is in such language as this, my friends, that Jehovah addresses perishing sinners. We have not spoken a sentence which is not borne out by His own holy Word. We need

not quote many passages. The substance of the whole is in the text: 'Incline your ear, and come unto me: hear, and your soul shall live.' And look, I beseech you, at these words, '*Come unto me.*' The Lord will have sinners to *come* to Him. '*Bring* them to me,' He says, when it is for punishment; as in the words, 'Those mine enemies, which would not that I should reign over them, *bring* hither, and slay them before me.' This is the language of the Lord when He is set for judgment. It is the language that will be thundered in the ears of every one who neglects the day of merciful visitation. But it is in other words He addresses you, when He would have secret conference with the soul, to win it over to Himself and to happiness. 'Incline your ear, and come unto me,' is His speech; and in the New Testament there is something added to it, which renders it, if possible, yet more encouraging to the sinner: 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.' Now, my friends, you all know with what soothing and enticing words sin allures her miserable victims into her service; how she speaks to them with every flattering persuasive, and spreads out before them prospects so fair and so alluring, that it is not easy for weak humanity to resist her blandishments. And you know also, how artfully she misrepresents the service of God, as if all *there* were pain and constraint and hardship; as if the gospel had no kind words and no comforts for the troubled soul. But in this text which is now before us, you are furnished with the means of giving the lie directly to the insidious enemy. The Lord Himself says to each of you, however guilty you may be, 'Incline your ear, and come unto me.' He will have all distance annihilated between your souls and Him. He will have you brought into the closest relationship and communion with Himself. He will have you not only within hearing of His voice, but in His very embrace. 'Come unto me,' He says. Such is the invitation; and if you had it in your own power to write down the terms in which you would desire an invitation to be given so full and so free as that none would be excluded from it, I do not know what terms you could find more suitable to your purpose than those which the Spirit here commissioned the prophet to employ. Indeed,

the terms are so free, and the parties to whom they are addressed—those, namely, who are spending their strength for that which is not bread, and their labour for that which satisfieth not—are apparently so unworthy, that we wonder at such an invitation addressed to such parties. And it may be, perhaps, that some of those now hearing me may be thinking with themselves, The words of the Lord are exceeding gracious ; but how can we come to Him, all vile and polluted as we are ? And thus it is, my friends, the grace of the Lord has always so far outrun the highest expectations of His creatures, that the quarrel between them and His offers has never been upon the question that the offer He makes is too small and too limited, but that it is too great and too free. The glad tidings of salvation are too vast to be believed, too good to be true. This is a terrible delusion, but many people are possessed with it. We tell them, upon the authority of the text and similar passages, that the Lord says unto them, ‘Come unto me ;’ and they answer, How can we come to God in our sins, and in our present defilement ? They put away our invitation because of its very grace. Well, be it so, that you will not come to God although He entreats you to do so now : you must be *brought* to Him afterwards. You can put off our message ; but you cannot put off that other messenger who will soon be sent forth to drag you to the presence of God, that you may be judged. This you must admit to be truth. And therefore we would again beseech you to reconsider our message, ‘Incline your ear,’ and ‘Come unto the Lord.’ He would not send this message to you if He were not ready to receive you. And if you feel that you are unworthy to come to Him, remember that there stands between Him and you one who is armed with all power to save,—who can give you a passport to heaven written with His own blood, and invest you with a righteousness in which Jehovah Himself will discern no flaw, and in which you shall find acceptance. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who makes poor sinners accepted in His beloved Son.

II. So much, then, for the invitation. Now as to the reasons given in the text for our closing with it, I cannot at present

speaking at any length. As has been said already, *they are two*, and each of them is very weighty. My friends, you will be vast gainers if you follow the leadings of the divine Spirit, and go into conference with God, and hear Him, and embrace His terms. 'Hear, and your soul shall delight itself in fatness; hear, and your soul shall live.' Your soul will live, you know, in one sense, whether you listen to God's offers or not. The soul will live and possess all its consciousness in hell. But Jehovah would have you come and live with Him, and enjoy a share of the blessedness which ever flows from Him to all His ransomed ones. And what a glorious life is this! There is indeed something like a foretaste of it to be had in this world. Every one who has been born again of the Spirit, and received into the family of God, is made a partaker of joys and comforts to which he was formerly an utter stranger. He has new sources of satisfaction and delight opened up to him, and a new relish for these at the same time imparted to him. He is introduced, as it were, into a new world, gifted with new capacities of enjoyment, and surrounded with new objects of enjoyment. Is it not so, believers? Does not the spiritual man, for instance, discern a beauty, a power, a significance, and a suitableness in the Word of God which at one time were hidden from him? Does he not find in the study of it, in prayer, and in all holy exercises, a satisfaction which cannot even be conceived of by the man of carnal mind? Is not the divine character invested in his view with fresh and ever-growing interest, when He looks at God in Christ, the Holy One and the Merciful, the Just One, and yet the Saviour? Is there not joy unspeakable poured into his soul, as by the Spirit's grace he gains more and more the ascendancy over sin, and advances in the attainment of the likeness of Christ? Oh, my friends, the life of the believer is the only life of real enjoyment upon earth. What will it be when he dwells with God Himself? Such is the gain of coming to the Lord. What is the loss, if you refuse the offer? Not only all this blessedness is forfeited, but the soul is lost. And who shall write the epitaph upon a lost soul? Who can conceive the despair, the horrors of the regions of eternal woe?

On this subject, however, I cannot enlarge. The judgment will come. We shall receive, it is said, the things done in the body. The lifetime of sixty, seventy, or eighty years will then have its full award apportioned to it. The very body will be a witness against the sinner then. The deeds done in the body. Seventy or eighty years of sin upon earth : what a reckoning ! Will seventy or eighty years of suffering in the world to come make atonement for it ? No. 'He that sowed to the flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption ;' and that for ever. There is no atonement but in this life, and that is not an atonement by the sinner himself. He who will not embrace Christ must stand before God with all his guilt upon his head—guilt that cannot then be pardoned ; for there now remaineth no more sacrifice for sin. Oh, my friends, let us lay these things to heart. It were indeed most melancholy if any of us here should, on looking back upon the whole course they have run, be compelled to say, 'I have spent my strength for nought and in vain.' How much more terrible will it be if these words should be extorted from them when they are just passing from time into eternity ! And they will be extorted from them, unless now, while God calls upon them to come to Him, they obey the call, and come and have life. But the offer of life *must* be embraced. We are not to put life away from us as if it were worthless. No. While the Lord calls, let us hear and accept the call. He calls us to come to Him. And to whom else can we go ? He has the words of eternal life. He calls us to come to Him through Jesus Christ. And surely there is everything in Christ to attract us—love, and grace, and tenderness.

Come, and let us go to the Lord, saying, We have wandered from Thee like lost sheep, but now we desire to return. We have spent many years in sin and folly, but now we would live to Thee. We can bring nothing with us but our sin ; but we trust to the atoning blood of Jesus. Let us thus come, and the Lord will receive us, and the year on which we have entered will be to us truly the commencement of a new life,—a life of real enjoyment,—a life which shall never end. Amen.

## XXXIII.

### THE HISTORY OF JOSEPH

‘By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel ; and gave commandment concerning his bones.’—HEB. XI. 22.

**A**LTHOUGH the history of Joseph occupies a large space in the Book of Genesis, the leading incidents in it are not very numerous. They are too numerous, however, to form the subject of one discourse. I must select, therefore, only a few of the most prominent points in it, as the leading design of this course of lectures on Scripture character is to convey practical instruction from what is recorded of the life and experience of some of those who occupy a marked place in the Word of God.

Now our purpose in this discourse is not so much to direct your attention to the particular truths which the text is fitted to suggest, as to mark some of the more prominent features of the history and character of this man of God, which are full of practical instruction. Perhaps there is not a more perfect character than Joseph portrayed among the saints of God, either in the Old Testament or the New ; in so far, at least, as we can judge from the information which it has pleased the Spirit to convey to us. He was an individual much tried by affliction at one period of his life : he was subjected afterwards to the yet more searching ordeal of prosperity ; but still the principle of grace triumphed. Faith shone forth during the whole of his eventful career, and never with greater lustre than when, at the close of it, that faith was about to be swallowed up in vision. We know not precisely at what age, or in what particular way, he was brought under the power of divine grace ; neither have we any account of his having received, beyond the dreams we read of, any such peculiar manifestations of the divine regard as other patriarchs were favoured

with. His life, in this respect, bears a closer resemblance to the ordinary life of the people of God *now* than did that of Abraham or of Jacob. There came no audible voice to him from heaven, saying, 'Fear not, I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward;' neither was the heaven opened to him, with the ladder reaching down to the earth, and the angels of God ascending and descending on it. But the truths which God had revealed, and which were handed down from one patriarch to another, were brought with power to his heart by the Spirit. He was enabled by the same Spirit to believe what they contained respecting the mode of acceptance with God, and the glory which is laid up for His people hereafter. And thus, just like any believer at the present day under the influence of the Word of God, felt by him to be a reality through the Spirit's teaching, and by the continued assistance of the grace of God, he was enabled to pursue a course in its general outline similar to that of Enoch, of whom it is written, that 'he walked with God.' It has often occurred to me, my friends, that never did uninspired man describe more graphically and truly the nature and the progress of the work of divine grace in the soul than Bunyan does, when in one place he likens *grace* to a fire burning, on which the enemy is perpetually pouring water; notwithstanding which, the fire yet burns more and more brightly, because there is one hidden from the view, continually employed in pouring oil into the flame. The whole life of a consistent believer, the whole life of faith, is, we are constrained to say, a mystery. It is often impossible to trace the origin of it. After it is begun, it has to encounter on all sides innumerable forms of opposition. It is *in itself* an undying principle; but then it is lodged in a tenement so frail, and so incapable of upholding it, that we cannot but wonder how it continues to be sustained amid all the adverse influences which are brought to operate against it. The hidden nourishment, the divine power put forth for its sustenance, for its growth, and for its perfection, is that alone which can account for the triumphs of Christ's people over the sins which beset them, and for their final glorification. In no case could all this be more fully illustrated than in the case of Joseph. The remarks which I have to offer will bring this out.



I have said above that we do not know at what age he was first brought to feel the saving power of divine truth. The first special notice we have of him is when he was seventeen years old, and when he was feeding his father's flock with four of his brethren, the sons of Bilhah and Zilpah. Then it is said, Gen. xxxvii. 2, 'He brought unto his father their evil report.' It is obvious from this, that the roughness of their manners and the irregularities of their conduct found no sympathy from Joseph; and that the principle of grace, which in every instance leads to separation from what is sinful, had at this time been implanted and partly developed in *his* soul. Just at the very time when boyhood begins to be impatient of control, when the serious lessons which had been imbibed in infancy are too often lost sight of in the new-commenced career of imaginary self-dependence, and when the wild and licentious pursuits of the profligate wear to the inexperienced the aspect of high-mindedness and manly freedom,—*at this most critical age* of human life, a gracious and holy influence had been exerted upon Joseph, so that he was enabled, not only to perceive and to appreciate the difference between the good and the evil, but also to choose the good and to abominate the evil. The heavenly fire had been kindled within him; but had not the oil been secretly supplied to keep it burning, it would soon have been extinguished.

1. One very adverse influence, which, had not grace prevented, would have been productive of the most miserable results, was the excessive and doting fondness of his father for him. 'Israel,' it is said, 'loved him more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age.' Such partiality has in cases innumerable proved ruinous to the objects of it. Its direct tendency is to foster habits of self-will, arrogance, and selfishness. The best natural disposition may be utterly perverted by it. It breaks up all the bonds of family affection, by creating separate interests where only one should be felt. If I were speaking of this subject generally, I might at great length enlarge upon the evils of an undue partiality as manifested by parents toward any one of their children above the others. While it destroys brotherly love, it also subverts the very foundations of parental respect and authority. That re-

spect and authority can only be maintained by the exercise of the strictest and most undeviating equity. But when one individual can count upon peculiar indulgence, he will soon learn to take advantage of that, in giving way to the natural impulses of his heart; and when the others perceive that, let them act as they may, they are still excluded from their rightful share of affection and regard, they will cease to desire it, and will become little careful to deserve it. But it is not with the general subject of the evil of favouritism in families that we have to do at present, but with the circumstance that such favouritism might have proved ruinous to Joseph, if God had not been pleased to interpose to prevent it. But we can here mark a twofold interposition. There was so much grace vouchsafed to the youthful servant of God, whose best interests were endangered by parental fondness, that from all that is written of his feeling and deportment, we cannot perceive that any bad effects were produced upon himself: still, had he continued to be subject to the corrupting influence, it might have left impressions upon his heart which it would certainly have cost him many a painful effort and much bitterness of spirit afterwards to get eradicated. And God, in kindness to him, interposed by His providence to save him from such misery. The way in which this was accomplished is singularly illustrative of the manifold wisdom of God, and of that characteristic of the divine providence whereby even the wrath of man is made to praise the Lord. The marked fondness of Jacob for Joseph excited, as it was naturally calculated to do, the envy and jealousy of all his other sons. And then the dreams of Joseph, which seemed to promise him the pre-eminence above his brethren, contributed very much to deepen these feelings in their hearts. These dreams would appear to them just as so many expressions of an ambitious temper, fostered by the undue partiality of their father,—as so many indications of what Joseph wished to be, and what, as the favourite of his father, he expected one day to be, *the ruler of his brethren*. And thus, under the influence of the most malignant passions, they watched for an opportunity of wreaking their vengeance upon their unoffending brother. How this was done it is unnecessary to relate at length, as the his-

tory is familiar to you all. But it is impossible to read the narrative without being struck with the manner in which, under the divine providence, what was in itself evil was overruled for good. There can be no excuse advanced and sustained for the sin of Joseph's brethren, in selling him as a slave to the Ishmaelites. Their guilt, indeed, lay heavily on their conscience ever after. They felt as if their sin had found them out, when Joseph at first pretended to treat them as spies who had come to see the nakedness of the land of Egypt. 'We are verily guilty,' they said to each other, 'concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore is this distress come upon us.' And again, after the death of their father, they were haunted by the fears suggested by a guilty conscience, and said, 'Joseph will peradventure hate us, and will certainly requite us all the evil which we did unto him.' Thus they themselves bore witness against themselves that their conduct toward their brother was utterly inexcusable. But still it was overruled for good, in three respects.

First, it operated as a salutary chastisement to Jacob; and by tearing from him his idol-child, taught him the necessity of seeking the portion of his soul exclusively in God.

Secondly, it also saved Joseph from a fearfully evil influence. True, he was left as an outcast in the hands of strangers. He had to exchange for a season the comforts and indulgences with which a father's fondness loaded him for the miserable state of slavery—the endearments of home for the toil and the hardships, at least so far as he could anticipate, which were generally the lot of a bondsman. The nursling of Jacob, whose every want had been supplied as soon as it was expressed, had to be exposed in the slave-market of Egypt, to be purchased, in the language of men, by a master cruel or kind, as accident might direct. Yet far better this, than that by continuing with his father he should be exposed to the risk of having his moral powers weakened or perverted by the excessive affection which was lavished on him; far better that he should learn by being a slave the habits of submission and dependence, than that he should be trained up to trample

on the rights of others, and to imagine himself independent of all control. There was the pouring of the *water* upon the grace in Joseph's soul while he remained at home, the object of his father's excessive fondness: the *oil* that kept the flame of grace burning in his heart came certainly from an unexpected quarter, when it was conveyed through the channel of servitude. How different God's ways are from man's ways! And how comforting the thought that *He* should mark out His people's path for them! If it were left to our determining, we would have religion always dressed up in the garb of outward comfort and ease and respectability, as it is called. But God will often have it otherwise. So that the soul may be making its way heavenward, when, if the *mere external* aspects of providence were contemplated, everything might seem to be against its upward progress. I cannot, however, at present dwell upon this subject.

It is further to be stated, thirdly, that the overruling providence of God, in the case of the sin of Joseph's brethren, is manifest from the circumstance that he was enabled to afford a refuge for his father and his family in Egypt during the time of famine. 'Be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves,' he said, on discovering himself to his brethren: 'for God did send me before you to preserve life, and to save you a posterity in the earth.' They meant it not for good; but God brought good out of the evil. How marvellous are His ways and dealings! When we look to the conduct of Joseph's brethren, in itself we perceive nothing at work but the dark passions of hatred and revenge; and we wonder how such wickedness should have been permitted to accomplish its ends to the injury of one of God's faithful children. But when we trace the whole scheme of providence in this matter, we find that while the perverse dispositions of the actors in this scene of cruelty were allowed to operate after their own form, and while their guilt was duly marked, the result was taken advantage of to promote the best interests of Joseph himself; to chastise Jacob for his idolatry, and to wean him from it; and to prepare a residence for the descendants of Abraham, until they should be strong and numerous enough to take full possession of the land of promise.

2. But now, in further pursuing the history of Joseph, after he was carried down into Egypt, we find him exposed to severe temptation, and by the power of divine grace triumphantly carried through it.

It was so ordered, that when Joseph was exposed for sale in the slave-market in Egypt, Potiphar, one of the captains of Pharaoh's guard, was attracted by his appearance, and bought him from the Ishmaelites. In *his* house we find him for a season, blessed himself, and a blessing to others. But trials awaited him; such trials as were calculated to bring his principles more severely to the test than they had ever been brought before. He was sorely tempted to turn aside from the path of duty, and to transgress the commandment of God. A woman, lost to all sense of decency herself, would have him to be her accomplice in licentiousness and crime. But he resisted and overcame by this argument: 'How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?' We obtain from this part of his history some insight into the practical principle by which he had been guided hitherto, and by which he was guided all along. He had been brought nigh to God through faith; and he lived under the influence of the great truth, that the eye of God was ever upon him. It was his conviction of this truth, and his keeping it vividly before him, that enabled him to reject the solicitations that were addressed to him by the Egyptian woman to commit heinous sin.

There are many considerations which may be brought to bear upon men's minds, and to keep them in the right path, in those cases where their conduct is open to the inspection of their fellow-men. Even very weak principle may be so fortified by the desire of maintaining an unblemished reputation, or by the wish to rise in the respect and esteem of others, or by the fear of losing some temporal advantage, that a man will be found to act uprightly and becomingly in the midst of strong temptations to do otherwise. Whereas, when no eye is upon him, and when he runs no risk of forfeiting his good name or injuring his worldly prospects, he will not scruple to give loose rein to his inclinations, however far they may draw him from the course which the Word of God prescribes. It is only under the influence of such feeling as that

which Joseph habitually cherished, viz. that he was ever subjected to the scrutiny of the all-seeing God, that secret sin as well as open sin will be resisted, and that there will be an anxiety to repress the wanderings of the heart as well as to regulate aright the outward conduct.

But we do not appreciate fully the principle embodied in the words, 'How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?' when we regard them merely as implying that Joseph lived under the conviction that the eye of God was upon him at all times. They very evidently show us that he had been led by the Spirit to *look upon all sin* as hateful in the sight of God, and therefore to hate it himself. The conviction which only came home in all its force to the psalmist's mind after he had transgressed, 'Against Thee, Thee only, have I sinned, and done evil in Thy sight,' was deeply lodged in Joseph's mind, and operated as a powerful preservative against transgression. He heard, as it were, the solemn words addressed to him, when he was tempted to commit iniquity, 'O do not this abominable thing which I hate;' and thus he was strengthened to maintain his integrity and a good conscience. Before leaving this part of the subject, there is one consideration to which it may not be unprofitable for a moment to refer, viz. this, that although there cannot be a doubt but the Spirit can and does actually impart fortitude to the soul to resist temptation, in answer to believing prayer, yet the way in which He ordinarily works, is by placing some truth or truths of the divine Word before the mind, and through the influence of these providing for the believer's establishment and advancement in holiness. Thus, in the case before us, it was the truth that God seeth all things, and that sin is hateful in His sight, that fortified the soul of Joseph. And in every case 'the sword of the Spirit is the Word of God.' With that weapon, when the Spirit gives the power to wield it, the weakest follower of Christ may overcome the most formidable temptations. And hence we always rejoice in seeing the young mind plentifully stored with divine truth. It may for a long season lie dormant there; it may seem to be choked, as too often it is, by the cares or pleasures of the world; but even when we cannot

trace its influence, it may be exerting a preventive power, and restraining from many sins which would otherwise have been committed. And when the Spirit does quicken, then all the materials are at hand which are necessary for building up in holiness and comfort, through faith unto salvation.

And yet once more before leaving this part of the subject, I cannot but advert to the striking reproof which this part of Joseph's history conveys to many of the young of the present generation. It is a kind of proverb, that as people grow old they find fault with the manners of the young, and refer with complacency to the better state of things which prevailed when they themselves were young. There may be some truth in this; but it will not be questioned that the present age is remarkable for its licentiousness. The young among us seem to think that they may give way to the indulgence of every passion, however impure. And sad, very sad is the result. It is sad for themselves, and sad for society. My young friends, let Joseph's example be before you; and let the words which strengthened *him* be kept vividly before your minds: 'How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?'

3. We now come to another era in the life of Joseph—another trial, and divine grace still further displayed.

If any one were to imagine that the exhibition of sterling principle would, in every case, *immediately* secure temporal advantage for him by whom it was exhibited, the history of Joseph, and we may say the history of God's people generally, would show the futility of such imagination. It might indeed be expected that those who prove faithful to God would always, in His providence, be permitted to reap some reward of their faithfulness; and ultimately they do so. But in the common order of providence it is often so arranged, no doubt as a trial of faith, that resolute adherence to the dictates of God's Word and of conscience exposes His people to troubles and sufferings from which they would have otherwise been free. Because Joseph resisted solicitations to sin, he was falsely accused by the lewd woman who would have drawn him into sin, and cast into prison. What an opening was thus given to the *Tempter* to assail him! Might it not have

been suggested to his mind most plausibly, that as there was nothing to be gained by pursuing the path of duty but enmity and ill-treatment, it would be better for him at once to cast away his religion, and live like other men? Such suggestions have sometimes been successfully employed in turning from the faith those who made a fair and credible profession. And in the case of a young man in a strange land, and with no friend to cheer and to animate him, it would not have been wonderful though the frowning aspects of providence had frightened him out of his religion, and driven him into infidelity. But he was strengthened for the trial. As it is expressed in the blessing which his father pronounced upon him: 'The archers sorely grieved him, and shot at him: but his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob.' We read that when he was cast into prison, 'the Lord was with him, and showed him mercy.' No mere onlooker could have known anything of the secret source from which Joseph drew strength and comfort during his imprisonment. A passing glance at his condition would have shown only the extremity of wretchedness. A poor helpless and friendless creature he would have been called, on whom adverse fortune seemed to take delight in inflicting her severest strokes. So would the world have spoken of Joseph at this period of his history. But what a different estimate does faith form,—faith enlightened by the Word of God, and guided by that Word! It beholds one of God's children in the furnace, put there by his heavenly Father to fit him for moving in another sphere; and when most deserted and friendless to all outward appearance, enjoying peculiarly the comfortable manifestations of his Father's presence, and of his Father's mercy. 'The Lord was with him, and showed him mercy.' What depth and significance there is in these words! *If the Lord is with a man*, and shows him mercy, he may well submit to any trouble at the hand of his fellow-men. No man can be friendless if the Lord is with him. No man can be unprotected, shut up in prison or elsewhere, if he has Jehovah on his side. No man can be poor if the Lord show him mercy. Yet the world could not have perceived or appreciated the comfort which God gave to His



servant in the instance before us. The oil that kept the flame of grace burning in the heart of Joseph was truly supplied in secret, when it was imparted in the prison-house.

4. But we have now another very different scene of his history to contemplate. Divine providence had so arranged it, that all the hardships which he had to encounter in his youthful years should terminate in his arriving at a very high point of earthly glory. By a wonderful interposition, we find the prisoner occupying, in a short time, the seat of the prime minister of Pharaoh, and having the whole administration of the affairs of Egypt committed to him, because of his interpreting Pharaoh's dreams.

This may be called the most trying part of Joseph's life. When every wish and desire could be gratified; yea, when every caprice would have been humoured; when the great ones of Egypt were bowing at his feet, and strangers were coming from distant lands to implore him to give them food; then was the danger to him, and then was the time when the lessons learnt in servitude and in prison had to be made practically useful. My friends, we would never entertain such fears for a man when providence frowns upon him as when it smiles. It is far easier to draw enjoyment from God when the world gives none, than to seek enjoyment *in God* when the world affords in full measure what it has to give. And for this reason we admire more the conduct of Joseph when he was the governor of Egypt, than his submission to his lot when he was a slave and a prisoner. Many people think religion useful enough for the sick-room, and for the chamber of poverty, who do not feel its value in the midst of health and prosperity. Many people *seem* to be religious in the season of trouble, who forget all the lessons and requirements of religion when they are delivered from their trouble. But it was not so with Joseph. He never forgot Canaan in the enjoyment of the honours and plenty of Egypt. He never forgot the God of his fathers amid the idolatries of Egypt. We can perceive how the training he had been subjected to in the school of adversity had been blessed to him; but verily if the oil of grace had not been supplied, he would have been *a lost man, and that* far more likely in the court of Pharaoh

than in the prison-house of Pharaoh, or in the hands of the slave-dealing Ishmaelites.

‘How hardly shall a rich man enter into the kingdom of heaven!’ says our Lord. In the parable of the sower, ‘The cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, choke the word.’ And Paul says, ‘Demas hath forsaken us, having loved this present world.’ Prosperity is in reality the furnace seven times heated. Unless God *is with* His people when the world smiles upon them, they cannot come out of the furnace uninjured. It forms a remarkable proof of the power of grace in the case of Joseph, that he was not corrupted by prosperity,—far more remarkable than that he was not crushed by adversity.

5. In the fifth place, we have a narrative of surpassing interest in the account which is given of Joseph’s revealing himself to his brethren. This narrative discloses the tenderness of his heart. He saw them in Egypt, in the strange land, and knew *them*, although they did not recognise him. The scenes of early life were brought up before him. His father—his mother—the whole family—the servants—the places where the flocks had been fed—the comforts of the paternal tent—in a word, *home*, with all its sacred and blessed associations, flashed upon his mind. With difficulty he exercised self-restraint for a brief space. But his heart was too full to be restrained; and, weeping for joy, he threw himself into his brethren’s arms, saying, ‘I am Joseph, whom ye sold into Egypt. And he fell upon his brother Benjamin’s neck, and wept; and Benjamin wept upon his neck. Moreover he kissed all his brethren, and wept with them: and after *that* his brethren talked with him.’ Here is family affection; brotherly love most graphically portrayed. Not a word of reproach does Joseph utter. He is only afraid lest his brethren should reproach themselves. The oil of grace must have been largely poured into his heart at this time; and it brought its own comfort along with it. For there are few feelings more delightful and refreshing than those which are connected with the interchange of family affection.

But although I would wish it, I cannot dwell upon this point.

6. I must now hasten to the closing scene of the life of this

servant of God, where we behold the power of grace peculiarly manifested.

If we had time for it, we might show how he had escaped the temptation to neglect to cultivate the domestic virtues, which, in such rank as he occupied, men very often fall into. There is something peculiarly pleasing in what is stated in the Old Testament history, that 'Joseph saw Ephraim's children of the third generation: the children also of Machir the son of Manasseh were brought up upon Joseph's knees.' There is very much of the endearment of a happy family suggested by these words. They let us into the secret of the domestic life of Joseph, and show us that he took a lively interest in the training of his children. And how much could he teach those who were brought up upon his knee of the wonderful dealings of God toward him! What precious lessons could he impart to them! But I cannot dwell upon the subject. The point which strikes us most in the closing scene of his life, is that referred to in the text, the preference he showed to Canaan instead of Egypt as his place of sepulture. 'He took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, God shall surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from hence.' The divine promises had found a lodgment in his heart, and nothing could displace them. He hoped for better things than the world could give him; and to show how firm his hope was, and how certain he accounted the divine promises to be, 'he gave commandment concerning his bones.' Egypt had been his home, the place where he had enjoyed all comfort for many years; but Egypt was not to be his final *resting-place*. The bones to the earthly Canaan; the spirit to God who gave it. He would have no inheritance in Egypt. The death of Joseph was altogether in keeping with his whole life. He had walked with God by faith in the coming Saviour, and not by sight; and the nearer he drew to the termination of his earthly course, the more full was his confidence in the reality of the divine word. How beautiful it is to behold faith and every other grace advancing toward maturity with the advancing age of the people of God, so that while the outward man perishes, the inward man is renewed day after day! And how animating is it to those who are still left to struggle for a season

in this mortal state, to see aged believers at the close of their pilgrimage triumphing over the fear of death, and laying down the frail tabernacle of clay with the full assurance that it shall be brought up again, purified and immortal, and fitted for the heavenly Canaan !

I regret, brethren, that the time will not allow me to pursue this subject further. There are many topics suggested for consideration as an improvement of it. The history of Joseph has always been referred to as typical of that of Christ ; and there are points of resemblance which must suggest themselves to every mind. Joseph carried down into Egypt as a slave, to perform the work of a bondman, and there tempted and ill-treated, until at length he was raised to honour, reminds us of Christ coming into this world as the servant of the Father, tempted by the wicked one, and injuriously treated, until by His resurrection He was declared to be the Son of God with power. Joseph, by the most unlikely means, rendered the instrument of providing blessings for his brethren, while his father mourned for him as dead, reminds us of Christ by His death—the most unlikely means to the carnal eye—procuring life and every blessing for all His people. These points of resemblance will suggest themselves to every mind. Many others have been mentioned by some writers, of which the following may be cited. 1. Joseph knew his brethren when they did not know him ; so Christ knows His own before they know Him—*He chooses them*. 2. Joseph behaved roughly toward his brethren at first, to make them feel their guilt ; so Christ's arrows wound the heart before His comforts and consolations come. 3. Joseph revealed himself to his brethren at last, and then what joy was felt ! so Christ reveals Himself at length to His people, and their hearts are filled with love and peace and joy. 4. Joseph, after discovering himself, loads his brethren with greater blessings than before ; so Christ makes all goodness to abound to His own people. These several points are stated and enlarged upon by one of our old divines (Mather) in his exposition of the types. And there is one thing he adds which believers would do well to take a lesson from. Joseph's brethren, especially after Jacob was removed, were afraid that he would

visit upon them the injuries they had done him; but he disarms at once all their fears and suspicions. Now Christ's people are sometimes full of misgivings, as if He would cast them off. But this is their infirmity. Those only who despise and reject Him have cause to be afraid. The humble and contrite spirit it is His peculiar office to cheer; He delights to revive the spirit of the humble and the heart of the contrite; and He will never put to shame, or suffer to be put to shame, the humblest believer who puts his trust in Him. Trust in Him therefore at all times, ye people. God is our refuge on high. Amen.

## XXXIV.

### THE CONFLICT AND THE REWARD.

‘He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches ; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.’—REV. II. 17.

THESE words form the conclusion of the epistle which John was instructed to write to the Church in Pergamos. There, as in all the other churches at that time, there were two great evils to be contended against—the sword of the persecutor from without, and the leaven of false doctrine within ; so that the followers of Christ had to pursue a course which could not be terminated successfully without the most resolute courage and determined resistance on their part. It is not necessary that I should occupy your time in commenting upon the particular trials which the faithful in Pergamos had to endure, and which are briefly described in the preceding verses of this chapter. It is sufficient to say respecting them, that they were of such a kind as to make a separation between the chaff and the wheat, between those who had only the form of godliness and those who were the true and devoted servants of the Lord. The words of the text lead us to speak exclusively of the faithful, and of certain blessings which they were to enjoy as the reward of their faithfulness. These form the two topics of the present discourse. But before I proceed to consider them, a few remarks may be offered upon the text in the way of exposition. And I would ask you to notice this first, that in every one of the epistles which are addressed in this book to the seven churches in Asia, the promise at the conclusion of the epistle is, ‘*to him that overcometh.*’ This fact shows us that particular emphasis is to be laid upon the expression, ‘to overcome ;’ and it must therefore be specially considered. Again, it requires

to be noticed that the promises connected with '*overcoming*' are not to be understood altogether with reference to the eternal state, as if then only they were to be enjoyed. *All* of them point to *that* state as affording the true embodiment and development and fruition of the promises; but, at the same time, *present* blessings are also implied. Christ gives His people foretastes of the heavenly glory. It doth not, indeed, yet appear what they shall be; but they have, amid all their discouragements, such gracious communications imparted to their souls, that heaven may be truly said to be begun on earth. Just to take one example. The promise addressed to the faithful in the Church of Laodicea is (iii. 21), 'To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in His throne.' This promise seems certainly to have reference to the heavenly state, and to specify the reward which there awaits those who have been faithful unto death. But the Apostle Paul, in his Epistle to the Ephesians, says, 'God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, *hath raised* us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus.' So that there is even in this life a shadowing forth of the enthroning of believers, which will only be perfected in the life to come. I might allude to other illustrations of the same kind; but what has been said will serve to justify the application of the words of the text, at least in part, to privileges which believers enjoy on earth, and which form to them the commencement of the blessedness which is laid up for them in heaven. Then further, as to the meaning of the words of the text, '*the hidden manna*.' In most of the churches planted by the apostles there were Jewish converts, and in some of them they formed the majority. How the case stood in this respect in the Church of Pergamos, we cannot speak with certainty. But many of the members of that Church must have been of Jewish descent, else there would not have been an allusion made to the manna. And when it is called '*the hidden manna*,' the reference seems to be to the pot of manna which Moses commanded Aaron to lay up in the ark of the covenant, that there might be a lasting memorial of the fact that the people had been fed with

manna in the wilderness, and a lively emblem of the more important truth that God in ways unknown can supply the spiritual necessities of His believing people. Once more, in the text it is said, 'I will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.' The former allusion would interest the Jewish converts; this one would be more fully understood by the Grecian converts. According to the ancient custom of the Greeks, when any one was accused of crimes against the State, and put upon his trial, he was either acquitted or condemned by the votes of the people. A white stone was the vote of acquittal; a black stone that of condemnation. And *this* seems to be the leading idea suggested by the words before us: that there is a full and public acquittal from condemnation for all who believe in Christ, together with some secret tokens of His favour, which none but He and they can understand. On these points, however, more will have to be said afterwards. The two subjects which the text suggests for consideration, as has been already stated, are—first, the description of Christ's people, as *overcoming*; and, secondly, the blessings which form their reward. May the Lord give us this day His special presence both in speaking and in hearing!

I. In the first place, I would direct your attention to the description of Christ's people, as *overcoming*. '*To him that overcometh* will I give to eat of the hidden manna.' The expression manifestly suggests conflict and victory. But these are only the *two extreme points* of a career which all who believe in Christ have to pursue. Christ is the Captain of salvation. His people are His soldiers. There is therefore a connection between them, which implies that *they* have enlisted under His banner knowing and believing that He is worthy of their confidence, and that He will enable them to conquer, and, at the same time, *willing* to follow Him wherever His service may require their efforts. When we read of a victory, our minds dwell almost exclusively upon the two things—the struggle, and the success with which it is crowned. But the other things to which I have alluded must not be lost sight of. Before the victory is gained there must



be the enrolling of the soldier in consequence of his voluntary offer of service; there must also be his being subjected to certain rules of discipline, and, as I have said, his expressed readiness to follow his Leader, wherever he points out the way. All these, and many more minute particulars besides, might be mentioned, as bearing very closely both upon the conflict and the victorious result. I cannot *enlarge* upon these particulars; but you will easily perceive the spiritual application of them. *The soldier must be enrolled.* This corresponds to the great work of the Spirit in *calling sinners effectually* from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, and thus giving them a place among the redeemed. Then, in connection with this effectual calling, or rather as forming a part of it, there is the self-surrender to Christ of him who is thus called, wherein he makes himself over to Him to be His servant, and to be implicitly subject to His will. This is just in other words a description of the vast change which is effected upon the sinner, when ‘the hard and stony heart is taken away, and a heart of flesh is imparted;’ or, to express it otherwise, *when the will is renewed*, and the man who formerly lived to himself, and scoffed at submission to the divine law, is brought to desire and endeavour to do what will be pleasing to God. And *then* the consequence of this renewing of the will is, that the believer is prepared to *follow Christ*, whenever he sees plainly what Christ would have Him to do, and where He would have him to go. Now it is when all these changes, or, as we may rather call them, *spiritual transformations*, have been wrought in the man, that the great conflict begins, which is to terminate in a glorious victory. It is true, indeed, that there is a kind of warfare with sin carried on in the hearts of the unregenerate, where conscience has not altogether lost its power. They feel in a thousand instances that they are acting wrongly; and sometimes they will resist a temptation, and triumph over it. But alas! they do not persevere. They perish amid numberless resolutions to amend and to devote themselves to the service of Christ. There is a conflict, indeed, at every point of the process which I have above adverted to, whereby the sinner is called into the divine family, and led to surrender himself to Christ, and

to become His willing subject. Do you suppose, my friends, that Satan, who, like a roaring lion, goeth about seeking whom he may devour, will permit any sinner to escape from his grasp without the most desperate efforts to retain him? While the conviction of sin is driving the transgressor to Christ, the wicked one strives to keep him back by many arguments. 'There is no need of such haste,' he whispers. 'Follow your own inclinations *now*; there will be room for repentance afterwards. Look at the Church, survey the character of multitudes who are in it, and have got a name for piety. They were longer worldlings and self-pleasers than you have been. See how many of the most noted saints who are referred to in the Bible were more deeply sunk in sin than you have been! They found mercy; so will you, although you should put away for a season the appeals of those who would call you to an immediate repentance.' These are some of Satan's arguments addressed to those who are at the very threshold of the divine life. By the Spirit's help they resist and overcome them; but it is only with a hard struggle, in which 'grace is made sufficient for them, and the strength of Christ is perfected in their weakness.' But it is not so much to these *first contendings* with sin and the evil one that the text seems to refer, as to the constant opposition which believers have to make against the trials which meet them in the prosecution of their Christian course, after they have once really entered on it. The whole of their progress consists in a series of conflicts, which, in the end, are crowned with triumph.

It would be interesting, and it might not be unprofitable, to enter largely into an enumeration of the points which are embraced under the head of the Christian warfare and victory. But in speaking of the subject at present, I would confine myself to the consideration of one or two particulars, which have reference to *ordinary Christian experience*. When we think of the times when the Apostle John lived and wrote his epistles to the churches, we associate with the words of *contest* and *overcoming* the idea of a struggle which ended in martyrdom. When we read, as in the epistle to the Church in Smyrna, 'Ye shall have tribulation: be thou faithful unto

death, and I will give thee a crown of life,' our thoughts revert to those seasons of trial when all who followed Christ faithfully had to contemplate at least the possibility of being put to death for His name's sake. And surely those who embraced the gospel with such a prospect before them, and who maintained their profession in defiance of all the cruelty of their adversaries, might truly be said 'to overcome.' Theirs was a nobler spirit than that which animates the soldier, who, under the excitement of the battle-field, and encouraged by the fervour of multitudes around him, braves death in seeking victory. The poor Christian martyrs who were faithful unto death had no such incentives to animate them. *Alone in their suffering*, and surrounded by a multitude who took pleasure in witnessing their tortures, and who mocked them, crying out, 'Away with them; it is not fit that they should live,' they had to finish their course, and to climb the ascent which leads to heaven. They gained what they fought for. They received the crown which Christ confers upon all who love Him. But in speaking at present of *overcoming*, I would not direct your attention to the sufferings and victories of the martyrs, but, as has been already stated, would allude to what is realized in *ordinary Christian experience*. We have not to seek for conflicts in the world without us, although *there* certainly they have to be encountered. 'A man's foes are those of his own household.' Whether there be persecution or peace *in the Church*, there is *within* every believer, *in his heart*, corruption that needs to be watched against and resisted, and outward solicitations to sin which must also be resolutely opposed. It may appear to some as an exaggeration to put these trials side by side with those which the disciples had to contend with, who resisted unto blood, striving against sin. But it is no exaggeration. It is a reality that the conflict of the believer has always been chiefly *within*, and *there* more difficult than *without*. I cannot enumerate at present all the enemies that have to be fought against; but I would allude briefly to some of them.

1. In the first place, there is the sin of *worldliness*, which the followers of Christ must overcome. In the greedy and grasping times in which we live, when the possession of wealth

leads to distinction and honour, without reference to the character of the possessor, the temptation is strong: 'Seek to be rich, and be not scrupulous about the means.' And when one sees on every side men rising in the world so hastily that their advancement cannot well be accounted for, there is a natural tendency to strive to keep apace with them in the pursuit of worldly gain. The soul is thus in danger of being altogether secularized, and having all its best affections deadened, if not utterly destroyed. Then when a man, by the power of divine grace, is enabled to resist the spirit of covetousness; when, sitting by himself, he can survey his acquisitions, and say, 'God has been very kind to me in His providence, and I willingly surrender for His service so much of what He has bestowed,'—there is a great victory gained; there is a triumph of faith over the baser principles of our nature; there is a progress from earth heavenward.

2. But I pass from this point to notice more particularly, in the second place, that there is a spirit of *selfishness* which the followers of Christ must overcome. I use the word selfishness here in a wider sense than it popularly carries in it. A selfish man, in the ordinary acceptation, is a worldly-minded or covetous man. But the meaning which I attach to the word at present, is that of a man's being governed by his own will, and pursuing his own ends, without reference to the will of God and the comfort of others. This may be called the natural condition of man; his state of feeling where the power of divine grace is not experienced. It cannot be said that there are no benevolent affections in the heart of those who are strangers to the power of the gospel. By no means. Family love, and friendship, and a desire to promote the temporal comfort of others, may operate and produce most happy results where there is no true fear of God in the heart. But what may be affirmed is, that with all this the man is a self-pleaser, and is not influenced by any reverence for the will of God.

Now what the gospel seeks to effect is, that the will of the creature be subject to the will of God, and that those who believe in Christ endeavour to live unto God, and give themselves up to do what His Word declares will be acceptable to Him.

Here is one practical illustration of what I mean by overcoming *selfishness* (Rom. xv. 2, 3): 'Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification. For *even Christ pleased not Himself*; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached Thee fell on me.' Here is another in a voice which issued from Gethsemane: 'Father, if Thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but Thine, be done.' And here is yet another from the Saviour's lips, telling His followers what they must be contented to endure: 'If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up His cross daily, and follow me. For whosoever will save His life shall lose it: but whosoever will lose his life for my sake, the same shall save it.'

Then the victory over selfishness which we must seek to gain, is just our becoming assimilated to Christ in mind and feeling and desire; seeking not to please ourselves, but our Father in heaven; renouncing our own will, and following Christ, whatever sacrifices and troubles we may be thus subjected to.

Now it is easy enough to speak of these things, but oh! it is a hard exercise to get them accomplished: 'For the flesh warreth against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh,' and the rebellious *heart* and *will* plead strongly that their impulses should be obeyed.

To surrender *self* to Christ is to give up liberty and to be enslaved, is the feeling which naturally rises up in opposition to the divine requirements. And for the most part there is no counselling voice from without to meet and restrain this feeling. *By himself* in secret a man has to fight the battle against the tendencies which would lead him to reject the right and to choose the wrong; and the more signal, therefore, is the conquest which is gained. For by the grace of Christ the victory *is won*. The paramount authority of God's law is felt and acknowledged; the evil desires which would have borne rule are suppressed; and the language of the heart comes to be, 'Speak, Lord, Thy servant heareth;' 'Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?' Oh, this is a glorious conquest! It is the highest triumph a man can achieve; a triumph over himself; a triumph of truth over passion and prejudice; a

triumph of the spirit over the flesh. *Then there is a soul set free.* Then there is another added to those who can say with the psalmist, 'O Lord, truly I am Thy servant: Thou hast loosed my bonds. I will offer unto Thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows unto the Lord in the presence of all His people.'

3. Once more, in the third place, I notice under this head, that the overcoming referred to in the text must be regarded as bearing specially upon carnality, and pride, and all the lusts and evil passions which prevail among men, and lead so many captive to sin and eternal death. This may be looked upon as only a repetition, in another form, of what has been already advanced under the names of worldliness and selfishness. And it is so in one respect. Yet it points to a more degrading servitude; and when the victory is gained by grace, to a victory so much the nobler. 'We all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh,' the apostle says, 'fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; walking according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience.' There is more meant in this passage than the forthgoing of a rebellious *will* and corrupt heart. There is a gross and most debasing submission to unholy desires and appetites. Such a condition is too commonly exemplified in our own day; but it was more common still when the apostle lived, and when all the terrible impurities of heathenism had to be contended against. In those times vices were deified, and those who practised them were excused on the ground that they paid worship to this or that divinity. It is not so among us. But the same passions are at work, and Satan is still busy in drawing poor sinners into the snare which these passions spread for them.

Impurity, and licentiousness, and intemperance, and anger, and malignity, seek to make us their slaves; and they must be fought with and conquered, therefore, if we are really on the side of Christ. And he who conquers these is better than the warrior who taketh a city by storm.

There are two striking pictures in connection with this sub-

ject suggested to us by the Scripture. The one picture is gloomy and terrible. It represents Satan as leading captive at his will the poor victims of sinful lusts and appetites; and the inscription written upon this picture is, 'Last, when it hath conceived, bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.' And then withal there is in the dark background the yawning mouth of the abyss into which the tempter and his captives are to be thrust, and where they are to be confined and tormented for ever.

But in contrast with this there is another picture which it is more pleasing to contemplate, that of Christ returning from His great work of redemption, after having seen of the travail of His soul, and carrying with Him the trophies of His victory. The psalmist describes the scene, when he represents the Redeemer as bringing His ransomed ones with Him to the abodes of bliss. There is triumph and shouting, and a voice is heard proclaiming: 'Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle. Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord of hosts, He is the King of glory.'

My friends, shall we be in that rejoicing and honoured multitude? Only if we have overcome. And how is this done? The answer is very plainly given. When John saw the host of the redeemed, they were clothed with white robes, and had palms, the emblem of victory, in their hands; and he was told that they had come out of great tribulation, and had washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb; and in another place it is said of them that 'they overcame the old serpent, the devil, by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony.' United to Christ by faith, and thus cleansed from guilt and delivered from the power of sin, they pursued their course under the guidance of his faithful Word, and through the strength imparted to them by the Holy Spirit. And hence the secret of their victory. And so, if we would be among them, we must, by faith, have Christ as our own, and give ourselves to Him, and make His

word our counsellor, and rest upon his Spirit's promised aid. Thus only shall we reach the glorious mansions, where there is the full enjoyment of the hidden manna, and the full recognition of the name written upon the white stone, which no man can read on earth, saving he that receiveth it.

Much, very much more, might have been said here, but—

II. I pass now, in the second place, to speak of the reward of those that overcome. And the first thing that is specified is '*the hidden manna.*' 'To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna.' If I had only to refer to the manna in this discourse, it would have formed a subject of itself. For much has been said about it in its typical relation to New Testament realities. For example, it fell around the camp of Israel, and it was to be gathered by the Israelites only. There is a good lesson here, viz. this, that God makes provision specially for His own people; and that in the Church, *i.e.* among believers in Christ, for they form the true Church, this provision is dispensed. Then, again, it was furnished in the wilderness; and this manifests the care which God takes of His people in *this world*, supplying their wants in a way which the world knows not of. But I need not pursue the subject further in this way.

There are two illustrations to be got, one from the Old Testament, and another from the New, which will supply us with abundant materials for remark on this point. The first is from Deut. viii. 3, where Moses, reminding the people of the way in which God had led them, says, 'He humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that He might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live.' The obvious meaning of this passage is, that God, in supplying manna for the relief of their temporal wants, would have the people rest upon His promises, as containing every blessing and enjoyment which they could desire. The manna, then, according to the explanation which Moses himself gives of it, is a symbol of all the good things which God, in His Word, has engaged to bestow upon His people. Then



the New Testament application of the meaning of the manna is fully made by our Lord Himself. In one of His reasonings with the Jews (John vi. 49-51), He said to them, 'Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven : if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever.'

Thus, then, in setting forth what is indicated by the promise in the text, we have two points to consider : First, and more particularly, Christ Himself as the manna ; and then, all the sweet and gracious promises of His Word, as connected with the enjoyment of Himself. In respect to both, it may be truly said that they are *hidden*, as the golden pot that had manna was laid up in the ark of the covenant. Christ is not prized by the world, neither are His promises. Worldly men say, as some of the Israelites said with regard to the manna, 'Our soul loatheth this light bread.' But though the value of the blessings which the gospel brings is not known to them, it is known to those who have been renewed in the spirit of their mind. And to *them* I would speak of it.

1. Christ Himself is the hidden manna. 'Unto you who believe He is precious.' Despised and rejected by worldly men, He is to believers the pearl of great price. And why? Because He gives them all things which they need for present enjoyment, and for the animation of their hopes. There is a vast difference between what is said of Christ to those who do not know Him savingly and experimentally, and to those who believe in Him, and have committed themselves to Him as their Saviour and Lord. Thus, for example, you can prove by many arguments how Christ is made of God unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption. But there is something better than mere argument when one can say, Christ has been made all this to me in my experience. First, the Lord Jesus Christ has been made wisdom unto me. For I was pursuing the path which leads to death, thinking myself wise, when His Spirit arrested me, and *taught* me that the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God, and that, if I would be wise, I must submit to Christ, who is the power,

and also the wisdom, of God unto salvation. And I did so, and am happy. I then fed upon the manna.

And, in like manner, may a justified sinner speak of Christ as *made unto him righteousness*. He can say, I once thought that I had in myself a sufficient title to appear before God, and to plead my own cause. But I have learnt how foolish that notion is. I see that Christ alone is the righteous one, and that in Him alone I can find acceptance with God. I see, and assent to this; and now I am happy, because, although vile and guilty in myself, I have Christ as *the Lord my righteousness*. I feed upon the manna. And so also as to *the matter of sanctification*, the follower of Jesus may well say, I knew not what it was to endeavour to be holy until I knew Christ. I lived only to myself before. But I have felt the power of His love upon my heart; and His love constraineth me to live not unto myself, but unto Him who died for me, and who rose again. Now this is Christ made sanctification to a man, when he who formerly lived to himself lives to the Saviour, and for His glory; and that is, in a blessed sense, to feed upon the manna. And once more, as to *redemption*. The believer can say that he has some experience of the truth that Christ came to redeem His people, not only from the curse of the law, but from all iniquity. 'I was lost, but Thou didst find me out: I was sold under sin, but Thou hast paid my ransom: Thou hast redeemed me, O Jehovah, God of truth.'

These are, or *should be*, present experiences of Christ's people. He is the bread of life, the manna; and they feed upon Him, and enjoy Him. And they have more blessedness in the enjoyment of Him than the highest earthly good could bring to them.

But then you will notice this, that there are variations in their feelings. Sometimes they are all in the light and very happy. At other times, they are under a cloud and disquieted. And at some seasons they seem to be in utter darkness. Why is this? Is there any change in the love of Christ? Is there any casting off by Him of those who once were His? No. For 'whom He loveth from the beginning He loveth to the end.' But here is the real state of the case. His people

sometimes forget what He is to them. They will trust in their own wisdom. They will make themselves righteous without His help. They will cleanse their hearts from sin without the aid of His Spirit's grace. Then His face is hidden from them. They cannot feed upon Him and enjoy Him in such condition. And it is only when they return with humble heart, confessing their offences, that they receive the returning sense of His favour.

This is to them like the sunshine after many dark and cloudy days. But what is it, after all, even when in this world they have the most vivid experience of the grace and love of Christ? It is only like the pot of manna in the ark of the covenant, which they know to be there, but which they cannot see.

My friends, let us not undervalue present privileges. To have Christ as ours, and to know that He is ours, is a source of blessedness which no words can describe. But there is something higher awaiting believers. The apostle speaks to the Colossians of a 'hope which was *laid up* for them in heaven,' and to Timothy of his having a crown of glory *laid up* for himself. The hidden manna is described in these words, '*laid up*.' It is but faint glimpses of Christ's glory, and an interrupted enjoyment of His love, which the holiest of His people experience here. *Sometimes* they feel that they are very near to Him. But there comes in something to break up their communion. There will be no such interferences between *them* and Him whom they love hereafter. They will see Him as He is, and He will make them glad with the light of His countenance. The golden pot of manna will then be taken out of the ark of the covenant, and dispensed among all the children of God. That is to say, Christ will be all in all to each one of them, and will receive them all to the full participation of His joy and of His glory.

2. But, in the second place, the hidden manna is an emblem of the sweet and gracious promises of God, of all the good things which, in His Word, He dispenses by His Spirit to His people. And what is there within the range of holy desire and of pure enjoyment which is not embraced by these exceeding great and precious promises? Christ indeed may be

said to be the sum and substance of them, for they are all concentrated in Him; but yet they stand out separately in the Scripture, as nourishment for God's children in their passage through the wilderness. Faith realizes them, and feeds upon them; and 'hope, exulting on triumphant wing,' lifts the soul upward to the full enjoyment of them.

Yet, with reference to the world, they may be said to be '*hidden manna*,' because they are for Christ's people alone. But Christ's people enjoy them. There was one of these in old times driven by famine from the land which he had been taught to look upon as his inheritance, and by God's holy dispensation left to die in Egypt. But upon his deathbed he could refer to the Angel of the covenant who had redeemed him from all evil, and with almost his last breath say, 'I have waited for Thy salvation, O Lord.' Jacob had found the promises to be refreshing and gladdening even when he was far from the land of Canaan; and are they not the secret source of enjoyment and hope to believers still?

Another servant of God in old times was much persecuted and troubled, and hunted from place to place as an evil-doer. Yet he could say, in the midst of all his sore trials, 'Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me? The Lord will command His loving-kindness in the day-time, and in the night His song shall be with me.' Here is faith feeding on the hidden manna, and hope soaring high in the enjoyment of it above all present distresses and alarms. Then, farther down in the sacred history, you read of a poor prisoner who was carried to Rome in chains, and thrust into a dungeon there. He had been a prisoner before. But this second time he was more severely dealt with, and was to receive the crown of martyrdom. In his dungeon, however, he could say, 'I know in whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He will keep what I have committed to Him against that day.' There was manna in the prison. As the rough jailor meted out to Paul his daily portion of coarse provision, and looked upon his cheerful countenance, he must have been astonished; but *we* can understand how this should have been. When Christ's disciples on one occasion brought meat to Him, and besought Him to eat, 'He said unto them,

I have meat to eat that ye know not of.' And so with Paul in the prison at Rome ; he had meat to eat which the wardens of the prison knew not of.

I might multiply examples to the same purpose. But it is unnecessary.

I shall just mention *four* promises, without attempting to expound them, in which you will find the hidden manna.

The first is that which gives a free and full pardon to the believer in Christ. You have it in these words : 'I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins.' This is something on which a sin-laden soul may feed with comfort.

The second is that in which God pledges Himself to be a Father to them that believe, and to make them His children. 'Ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear : but ye have received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit Himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God : and if children, then heirs ; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ ; if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together.' And surely there is enough here, both for present enjoyment and for the nutriment of hope.

The third is that in which He promises to sanctify His people wholly, and to make them like Christ. 'For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the first-born among many brethren.' 'And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly ; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.' There is help here for a believer in his difficulties, and under his saddest depressions. God works the work. You are a weak fellow-worker with Him at any time. And if you think of your own unworthiness, you will feel as if you could not hope to reach heaven ; but from this word of promise you may extract comfort. Fighting against sin with the help of God's Spirit, you will get the victory.

The fourth promise is that which makes the triumph of believers sure. 'Whom He hath predestinated, them He also called : and whom He called, them He also justified : and

whom He justified, them He also *glorified*.' My friends, there is future glory here wrapped up in the promises of God. 'Whom He justified, them He also glorified.' To be 'glorified'—what is this? It is something more than can be imagined or expressed. It is the verification of what the apostle says: 'As we have borne the image of the earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.' When the dead shall be raised, and you shall *see* Christ and *hear* His voice, then the promises, which were *hidden* manna before, will be enjoyed in all their fulness. Then, and then only, will the eye be satisfied with seeing, and the ear with hearing.

3. But I have to notice once more, that the hidden manna lies in the ordinances of God. It is to be brought forth from the ark of the covenant and set before us this day. Bread and wine for mere formalists; Christ and His benefits for believers. We are this day carrying on the work which Christ prescribed for the Church till He come again. *Bread*, the emblem of the truth that the Son of God was made flesh. Bread broken, the emblem of His sufferings in working out the redemption of His people. Wine poured out, the emblem of His blood shed for the remission of the sins of many. Not the conveyancer of pardon to the guilty, but the *seal* of peace to those who have been reconciled to God. Manna to believers, *hidden* manna, in so far as they get spiritual blessings which none else can perceive or know; but refreshment to their own souls when they can say, 'The Lord Jesus Christ offers Himself to me: I take Him.' 'My beloved is mine, and I am His.'

I must reserve consideration of the remaining part of the text, respecting the white stone, to the concluding address. Now, in drawing this discourse to a close, I would offer two remarks.

1. The first is addressed to those here who must be classed among the ungodly. They have not overcome. They are still the slaves of Satan. They may have enjoyed the manna so far as it is typified by word and ordinance, but they have not really partaken of what God gives; they are yet among the husks; and if, feeding upon these, they think that they are well, alas! they will perish there. But, my friends, you

must not perish there. God has rich stores laid up for His people. However unworthy you are, you are invited to come and partake of them. Come, then, and partake, for a *crumb* from the Father's hand is surely better than all the husks upon which the swine do feed.

2. My concluding remark is addressed to the people of God. There is a conflict: you are engaged in it. There is a victory: you will gain it. There is hidden nourishment for you while you fight the battles of the Lord. Oh, take the promises home to you. Take Christ home as your own. Love Him, trust Him, follow Him. Then you will have present comfort, and then, on good ground, the hope of future glory. We read in chap. xi. 19 of the Book of Revelation, that 'the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in His temple the ark of His testament: and there were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail.' And no wonder. The hidden manna was to be brought forth. The wicked were to be driven away from the enjoyment of it. And the Lamb was to come to feed His people Himself, and to lead them to living fountains of waters, and to wipe away all tears from their eyes. Amen.

## XXXV.

### THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST.

‘Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.’—JOHN XX. 17.

THE subject to which I would call your attention on the present occasion, is that of Christ’s ascension to the heavenly glory. It is a subject full of interest to His people, and rich in matter for their meditation. But to enter into it, and to enjoy it, we must have our hearts in a spiritual and elevated frame. May the risen and exalted Saviour by His Spirit enable us so to contemplate it, that we may feel as the apostles did when they beheld His glory on the mount of transfiguration, and said, ‘Lord, it is good for us to be here!’

It is not necessary that I should speak at any length of the circumstances which are detailed in the surrounding context. The implacable enemies of Christ had apparently gained a complete triumph over Him. ‘By wicked hands He was crucified and slain;’ and by a few of His weeping disciples He was laid in the sepulchre. Although He had told them repeatedly that He must suffer and die, and rise again from the dead, they had never fully apprehended the meaning of His words. It was with heavy and sorrowful hearts, therefore, that they consigned His body to the grave. They thought it was He who was to redeem Israel. But as the redemption was not wrought out in the way they had anticipated, all their bright dreams vanished when He died upon the cross, and were buried with Him in Joseph’s tomb. It was not with the most distant expectation of seeing Him alive that Mary and the other women came to the sepulchre early on the morning of the first day of the week, but to pay a tribute of affectionate respect to His body, by embalming it



more carefully than there had been opportunity to do when it was taken down from the cross. Even when they found the sepulchre open, and saw that the body of Jesus was not there, the thought of the resurrection never once gleamed upon their troubled minds. All that Mary could say, amid her tears, was, 'They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him.' And when Jesus Himself appeared to her, and was not at first recognised, 'she, supposing Him to be the gardener, saith unto Him, Sir, if thou have borne Him hence, tell me where thou hast laid Him, and I will take Him away.' But the recognition took place when the well-known voice said, 'Mary.' And in her joy she would have embraced her living Lord. 'But Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.'

Now there is something peculiarly sweet and touching in these words of Christ, which I must allude to for a moment, before proceeding to consider the great subject of the text. 'Go to my brethren,' He said. He had called His disciples, His children and His friends before. He had also on one occasion called them His *brethren*. When His mother, and His brethren according to the flesh, came to Him to interrupt Him in His work, He said, 'Who is my mother? and who are my brethren? And He stretched forth His hand toward His disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.' But what had been the conduct of those who had enjoyed His most intimate friendship, when the time of His sore suffering came? They all forsook Him and fled; and the one who did follow at a distance, denied Him. Then how beautifully do the words of Christ stand in contrast to all this! Lest it should be imagined that He had cast off from His affection those who had acted so undutifully and unkindly toward Him, He commissioned an angel to say to the women who came to the sepulchre, 'Go and tell His disciples, *and Peter*, that He goeth before you into Galilee;' specifying by name him who had denied Him; and to Mary He said Himself, 'Go to my

*brethren*, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father.' And we perceive the same warmth of heart manifested by Him during the period that intervened from the resurrection to the ascension. When He came to visit the disciples, His salutation was, 'Peace be unto you.' And when He might have severely rebuked Thomas for his unbelief, His words were, 'Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing.' So that, altogether, we find the same love in Christ when risen from the dead, that He manifested while He went about with His chosen followers on earth. And when the time came that He should be separated from them *personally* for ever in this world, we read, that 'He led them out as far as to Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. And it came to pass, while He blessed them, He was parted from them, and carried up into heaven.' What a subject of rejoicing it should be to us to think of Christ's parting in this way with His disciples! What had he received from the world generally, and even from *them*, but treatment the most ungrateful? 'He came unto His own, and His own received Him not.' But did He render evil for evil, and reviling for reviling? Nay; He left His blessing with the world; a blessing which has borne much fruit already, and which will be more productive still, when, through the enlarged communication of His Spirit's grace, in prophetic language, 'He shall come as the rain, as the former and the latter rain unto the earth.'

I might say much more on this topic, and on others connected with it; but I must proceed to the subject which is more expressly to be considered, viz. the ascension of Christ. And in handling it, I would direct your attention to the following points. In the first place, I would speak of the doctrine of Christ's ascension, and what is implied in it; secondly, I would refer to some of the proofs of its reality; thirdly, I would note some of the precious consequences of it; and, fourthly, some of the encouragements which it holds forth to believers to keep fast their profession. The practical influence which it is fitted to exercise upon the followers of Christ will form the application.

I. In the first place, I would speak for a little of the doctrine of Christ's ascension, and what is implied in it. Together with the resurrection, which may be called the first step toward it, it forms one of the leading subjects which the apostles enforced, both by preaching and writing. They never ceased to inculcate the great doctrine of the atonement. They were not ashamed of the cross of Christ, although it was to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness. But they did not remain looking for ever into the grave. 'The Lord is risen, and hath ascended into heaven,' were truths which they constantly dwelt upon in connection with the fact, that, branded as a malefactor, He laid down His life a sacrifice for His people's sin. In the very first public address which Peter made to his countrymen on the day of Pentecost, after speaking to them of the guilt with which they were chargeable in crucifying the Lord of glory, he said, 'This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, He hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear. For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit Thou on my right hand, until I make Thy foes Thy footstool. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.'

It is unnecessary that I should quote any other passage, because this one comprehends in it the whole truth respecting the ascension of Christ into heaven, and what is therein implied. What the apostle would have the Jews consider, when he thus spoke to them, was *not the bare fact* that Jesus of Nazareth, having been raised from the dead, and having ascended into heaven, was now removed from any attempt of theirs to injure or dishonour Him, but that His exaltation invested Him with boundless power to carry into effect all the purposes which He had been appointed to accomplish. 'He is both Lord and Christ,' the Apostle Peter says; and in another place the same apostle writes, 'He is at the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject to Him.' And this is *practically* what is to be under-

stood by our Lord's ascension: His having all authority committed to Him over all creatures in the universe, to make them subservient to the ends which, as Messiah or Christ, the Redeemer of lost sinners of mankind, He has undertaken and promised to carry into effect.

The *personal* removal of the Saviour from this world, and His advancement to glory, as the reward of His humiliation and obedience unto death, would have no interest for us, if it were not that we are taught to connect with all this the right and the power which He has obtained, and which He exercises, to make all things work together for good to them that love Him. Christ ascended into heaven, is Christ exalted to be Head over all things to the Church, which is His body, and to wield all that power in heaven and in earth which has been delegated to Him, for the benefit of that Church which He has redeemed with His own blood.

There are two powers that are opposed to each other in this world which we inhabit: the power of Satan, the prince of darkness; and the power of Christ, the King of Zion, and the Lord of light and life. Which of the two will *finally* prevail, we can have no doubt or difficulty in determining. The divine Word tells us that 'Christ will reign until He hath put all enemies under His feet.' But since the Fall till now, and even now as fiercely as ever, the conflict between the two powers of light and darkness is carried on. Now why is it so? it may be asked. How comes it to pass that Christ, who has ascended into heaven, and who could in an instant crush all the influences which are opposed to the extension of His kingdom, permits the wicked one to retain so widely his usurped dominion over the souls of men? These questions, it must be acknowledged, have their difficulties. There are mysteries in the government of Christ's kingdom which no man can pretend to solve. But as it has been wisely and devoutly remarked by a solid divine, in answer to the question, Why was the manifestation of Christ in the flesh so long delayed? why did He not come sooner? that one reason for it may have been, that God may have designed to teach men the necessity of their submitting to *His* way of salvation, by giving them long experience of the utter inefficiency of the

natural conscience, and reason, and intellect to make them truly blessed ; so, unquestionably, it may be said with regard to the present tolerance of the power of Satan under the reign of Christ, that it is for the working out of some great end, which in due time will be made manifest. There is one characteristic of the divine economy for the salvation of sinners, that it is *sovereign*—that is to say, that it is conducted on the principle that God gives no account of His matters, but, according to His own will, has mercy upon whom He will have mercy. There is not one of the redeemed who will not make these two acknowledgments : first, that he is what he is solely through sovereign grace ; and, secondly, that his life, previously to his being savingly called to the knowledge of Christ, was not only not worthy of the name of life, but was governed by principles which had no reference at all to the will of God. Then why this waste of time and activity, which might have been employed in Christ's service ? Why was not this man sooner brought under the power of grace ? Why was he so long left to be the vassal and slave of Satan, when the will of the heavenly King might have made him from his birth an instrument of advancing His glory ? No one can give a full reply to these inquiries. But there is one thing which the redeemed sinner can say, that in his deliverance from Satan's bondage, he has been taught to magnify the power and the grace of Christ as he would not otherwise have done. And even so, on the large scale, the reigning Saviour may permit the darkness and disorder which Satan has spread over the world to prevail for a season, that when the true light shines forth in its promised brightness, and all nations feel its blessed influence, His sovereignty and His love may be rightly prized and adored.

But these remarks have led me somewhat away from my main subject, the ascension of Christ, and what is implied in it. When the Son of God descended from heaven, to appear in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to offer Himself a sacrifice for sin, He made fully manifest the truth that the bond between heaven and earth which man's apostasy from God had broken, was again to be repaired and drawn more close than ever. For the visitations of God to man in paradise before

the Fall did not bring the Creator and the creature so near to each other as did this other new and divine economy, when 'the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among men, (and they beheld His glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.' Then, again, when Christ ascended into heaven, the tie between heaven and earth was made indissoluble, because He carried the human nature with Him, united to His divine person. He was thus shown to be *one* with His people—as truly one with them in heaven as He was when He associated with them on earth as their friend and brother. Jehovah is the Father of all in the sense of being the Creator of all. But the expression comes home to our hearts with inexpressibly deeper tenderness when we think of Christ having ascended into heaven in our nature; as He Himself said, 'To His Father, and our Father; to His God, and our God.'

And then notice further, that He who in His ascended state has all power in heaven and in earth committed to Him, and who reigns as the Church's King and Head, is Jesus Christ, the same person who wept at the grave of Lazarus, and stood at the bar of Pilate, and hung upon the cross. Does not this fact impart to His ascension a special interest? It is the Son of God *in the human nature* who has angels and principalities and powers now subject to Him. And what reason, then, can we have to despond with regard to our present condition in the world, or to the trials which we have to encounter either from temporal or spiritual enemies? The human nature is in heaven already, in the person of Christ, and every believer in Him will be enabled to fight his way thither, although all the powers of earth and hell should be combined to obstruct him. Only make it sure that you are Christ's, and then you may commit all your fears, and all your difficulties, and all your hopes also, to Him, who will realize your anticipation in due time, and carry you through the difficulties to the full enjoyment of more than the brightest hope ever pictured to your mind. These are points, however, to which I shall have to refer again, and therefore I do not enlarge upon them now, but proceed to consider the second topic.

II. Under this head I was to allude to some of the proofs of the reality of Christ's ascension. We naturally look back with intense interest to the scene of the ascension. We imagine the feelings of the eleven apostles as they saw the Lord depart, and beheld the thick cloud receive Him and hide Him from their sight. And we can sympathize with them in the feeling of wonder which they must have experienced, when, as we read (Acts i. 10), 'As they looked stedfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven.' We would have wished ourselves to be present at that most memorable time, and to have seen the Saviour with His outstretched arms pronouncing His words of blessing, and to have got the last glimpse of His countenance as He disappeared under the overshadowing cloud. These desires, however, are vain. But we may console ourselves by the words which the Lord addressed to Thomas: 'Because thou *hast seen*, thou hast believed: blessed are they who have not seen, and yet have believed;' and by the words of His apostle: 'In whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.'

The ascension of Christ into heaven was a *matter of fact*, only once done, and therefore to be certified by proper evidence. I think we have as good proof of it as if we had been at Bethany when He was taken away, and as if we had been looking after Him when, with uplifted hands, He left His blessing with His disciples. I do not intend to enter at great length into this part of the subject. But there are three arguments by which you may be as fully satisfied of the reality of Christ's ascension as if you had been eye-witnesses of it. There is the *external* argument, the *internal*, and the *personal*.

1. In the first place, with respect to what may be called the *external proof* of the ascension of Christ, we have the same steps to follow as if we were demonstrating the truth of His resurrection. The apostles declare that they saw the Lord ascend into heaven. They had had visits from Him be-

tween the time of His rising from the dead and His ascending ; but after this latter event, which they tell us they witnessed, they speak of Him as having ascended on high, and being at the right hand of God. Could they have been deceived in what they supposed they saw, when the Lord was taken away from them ? That is impossible, for He *walked out with them* as far as to Bethany. Could they have united together to propagate a story which they did not credit ? It is far more rational for us to believe in the truth of what they declared, and what they persisted in declaring in defiance of persecution and even of martyrdom, than to suppose that these witnesses of Christ conspired together to cheat the world, and to sacrifice their lives for a lie.

2. But, passing from this point, I notice, that the great standing proof of the ascension of Christ to heaven is to be found in the mission and work of the Holy Spirit. This I call the *internal proof*, because it is so thoroughly interwoven with the whole scheme of divine revelation. It was the subject of prophecy. For the psalmist had said, ‘Thou hast ascended on high, Thou hast led captivity captive : Thou hast received gifts for men ; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them.’ But more especially it was one of the leading subjects of our Saviour’s teaching, and it was so expressed as to connect the *fact* of His ascension with the *mission of the Spirit*. ‘When the Comforter is come, *whom I will send unto you* from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, He shall testify of me.’ And again, ‘I tell you the truth ; it is expedient for you that I go away : for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you ; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you.’ And once more, as we read in the Book of Acts, when He was about to leave the apostles, He commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, *saith He*, ye have heard of me. For ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence. Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you : and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth. You will



perceive at once, then, the connection between the fact of our Lord's ascending into heaven, and the mission of the Spirit as a proof of the reality of it, from these passages.

Christ was to ascend unto the Father ; but He had not lost sight of the interests of His people. He would not have them suppose that, in going away from them, He had forgotten them. He was to be with them alway, even unto the end of the world ; and His ascending into heaven was just to make good this promise. They would know that *He was* with the Father when they received the Holy Spirit ; and the Holy Spirit would bear witness to them of Him, and take of the things which were His and reveal them to them.

Then, if the Holy Spirit is in the Church ; if by His power the apostles wrought miracles, and, weak and ignorant as they were in themselves, were enabled to confound the wise and the mighty ; and if from their days, from age to age, there have been such changes produced upon human society by the diffusion of the gospel as to make the Christianized world a new world in comparison with what it was before, we owe it all to the work of the Spirit whom Christ promised to send forth as the evidence of His having gone to the Father. Bad as the world is now, it is certainly better than when Christ lived in it. And why is this ? What has made the difference ? It is not any improvement of the natural powers of men. For we look back for our models in art, and for our examples of what is tastefully pure in literature, to what are called the classic ages. But read the last part of Rom. i., read other parts of Scripture, where the state of the heathen world is described, and contrast what was then with what is now, since the day of Pentecost ; and amid all the sin and darkness which still prevail, you will see that Christ must have ascended to the Father, as He said, else there could not be so much of heaven upon earth as there is by the work of the Spirit, whose grace has raised the Church, and through the Church the world, to a position so much higher than it formerly occupied. If Christ had not ascended to heaven, and sent forth His Spirit, there would be no awakenings in the Church of the dead to life ; there would be no forthgoings of Christian benevolence for the salvation of lost sinners ; there would be

none of those blessed and cheering hopes which sustain the soul under the severest trials, and make the grave itself not the place of darkness, but the very gate of admission into glory.

3. In the third place, and in immediate connection with what has just been stated, there is what I would call the *personal* argument for the ascension of Christ, which arises from the experience of His believing disciples. Of them there are many who can say that the Holy Spirit bears witness with their spirit that they are the *children of God*; so that they have the reality of that relationship made good to them, the consummation of which is set forth in the text, when the Lord says, 'Go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father.' They know that He their brother is in heaven, because by giving them His Spirit He has enabled them to claim God as their Father in heaven, and to rejoice in His love. But besides this, they have the further experience of answers to their prayers. The Lord Himself has established a connection between His ascension into heaven and answers to believing prayer. Speaking of His resurrection, and of the glory which was to follow, He said to His disciples, 'Verily, verily, I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, He will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.' Our prayers could neither be received nor answered, but for Christ's presence in heaven. He first gave satisfaction for all the sins of His people, and then opened up the way for them into 'the holy place not made with hands.' And now the language of promise, as Paul gives it to the Philippians, is, 'My God shall supply all your need out of His glorious riches by Jesus Christ.' My friends (I speak to Christ's believing people), you have prayed, and you have been heard. You have sought blessings, and they have been given, perhaps not always in the way in which you would have chosen to receive them, but still, as you feel, in the right way. What interest had you in heaven, and what reason to hope that your voice would be listened to there? There is one reason, which answers every question, and which satisfies you: 'Christ is there, and gains

for our prayers a hearing there. We have prayed in His name and have been answered, and we are sure therefore that, as He said, He has ascended to the Father.' This *personal* or experimental evidence of the ascension of the Lord is the best of all. It may be met, indeed, by apparent objections. For example, it may be said that those who pray to the Virgin Mary and to the saints believe most firmly that their prayers are heard; and so we must suppose they do. But we can account for their delusion. God gives *temporal* bounties to all His creatures indiscriminately; but they may mistake, if not the source from which such bounties come, at least the channel through which they are conveyed, and therefore they pray and give thanks wrongly. Forbearance is exercised toward them, lest in the plucking out of the tares the wheat should be rooted up also. But in the matters which are most important,—viz. in supplication for the spirit of *holiness*, of *love*, of *power*, and of a *sound mind*,—it may be made a question whether the mediation of the Virgin and of the saints is ever had recourse to. At all events, this is certain, that there is no authority for making appeal to *them*; whereas Christ has told us to pray in His name, because He has gone to the Father, and will obtain for us whatsoever we ask in His name believing. But this is a digression from my subject, although in some measure suggested by it. The truth which I inculcate under the present head of discourse is, that we have the fullest evidence of Christ's ascension to the heavenly glory, not only from the testimony of eye-witnesses, but from the verification of His own promise in the mission of the Holy Spirit, and from the felt experience which His people have of the fulfilment of that promise—the answers which are given to their prayers.

III. I now proceed to consider the third topic which was to be handled, viz. some of the precious consequences of Christ's ascension. This is a wide subject, and it has been already in part alluded to, because it is impossible to keep separate here the several particulars, which are like so many lines terminating in one point.

1. In the first place, I notice that one of the precious con-

sequences of Christ's ascension is, that it was the completion of His great work of atonement, or I might rather say, the security to His people that it was completed, and that He has power to make it effectual. Having had to direct your attention very lately to this subject, in expounding the Epistle to the Hebrews, I need not say much upon it now. But it may be noticed briefly, that the ascension of Christ has an immediate bearing both upon His office of *Priest* and of *King*. With His priestly office it was connected in this way, that He had to fulfil all which was typified concerning Him. And as the Jewish high priest, after he had offered the sacrifices which the law prescribed for his own sin and the sin of the people, carried the blood into the holy of holies and sprinkled it upon the mercy-seat; so Christ, when He had offered the sacrifice of Himself, went into heaven to present Himself there as having completed the work which He had undertaken to perform, and to obtain, if I may so speak, the formal approval of His work in the sight of the heavenly hosts. The *atoning* sacrifice terminated the priesthood of Christ on earth. His ascension into heaven was the commencement of His priesthood there as *Intercessor*. 'He has gone into heaven, there to appear in the presence of God for us.' And it is because of His having thus ascended that we can feel the force of the apostle's language: 'It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.' But then further, as I have said, the ascension has a direct bearing upon His kingly office. It made the priesthood complete, and it formed the *open assumption* of the kingly power on His part. Christ's priestly office is inseparably connected with His kingly authority. 'He is a king and a priest upon His throne.' And so, whatever blessings we need as guilty creatures, we obtain through the High Priest, who has offered the sacrifice and makes intercession; and whatever help we require as exposed to troubles and temptations, we get from Christ, who reigns as the King of Zion. Christ, who has ascended *into* heaven, has borne the weight of His people's guilt with Him, and obtained their discharge from the condemnatory sentence of the law. Christ

reigning *in* heaven bears the whole burden of His people's troubles, aids them in their trials, and secures for them the victory over all their enemies. He was the Prophet of the Church when He went about teaching in Galilee, and in Judea, and in Jerusalem. He was the Priest of the Church when He suffered the just for the unjust. But He is Priest and King unitedly when, having by Himself purged our sins, He ascended into heaven and sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.

2. But, in the second place, I notice here, that another precious consequence of the ascension of Christ is, that upon it rests the stability of His Church, together with the supply of all which is needful to the perfecting of it through the work of the Holy Spirit. I have already quoted the psalmist's words, 'He ascended up on high, He led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.' And the Apostle Paul gives us a commentary upon them: 'He ascended up far above all heavens, that He might fill all things. And He gave some apostles, and prophets, and evangelists, and pastors, and teachers, for the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ; till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.' And in another place the same apostle says to believers in Christ, 'Ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; and are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, *Jesus Christ Himself being the chief corner stone*; in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord.' The Church of Christ—that is, the whole body of true believers in Him—is here likened to an edifice erected for His glory. He is the chief corner stone of it Himself. Now when we think of the foundation on which the Church rests, we are disposed to stop at Calvary, where the great sacrifice was offered, and say to ourselves, Here is the basis on which the structure stands, viz. the death of Christ as an atonement for sin. But our judgment is defective. The foundation of the Church is not to be sought for on Calvary, but in heaven. *There*

Christ is in our nature ; and because He is there, the Church is placed upon a foundation that cannot be removed. Whatever is needed for her light and guidance and comfort,—whatever is indispensable for her government and security,—whatever will contribute to her perfection, is to be sought for *in* Him and *from* Him who hath ascended on high to obtain gifts for the rebellious, that God the Lord might dwell among them. This indwelling of God is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, whose work is at once the *evidence* of Christ's ascension and the *fruit* of it. By His gracious influence, heaven and earth are brought together. He speaks for Christ on earth, and He points out to sinners the way to heaven through Christ. And thus He verifies the promise of Christ: 'Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.' The Spirit in the Church is Christ in the Church. And as, when His disciples were nearly engulfed in the sea of Galilee, they were delivered from all their troubles by His coming to them, and saying, 'Fear not, it is I ;' so His believing people may as really dismiss their fears now with respect to the safety of the Church, when they have the Spirit with them whom Christ promised to send, and does send from the Father.

3. In the third place, another precious consequence of the ascension of Christ is this, that it furnishes to the faith and hope of individual believers a sure resting-place. The future was very dim even to the Old Testament saints. It was darkness altogether to the heathen. It has become to us what we can speak about and rejoice in as a *blessed reality*. The resurrection of Christ has secured His people's. And His ascension into heaven is His taking possession in their behalf of mansions for their residence. There can be no doubt of their exaltation to glory, because Christ, the God-man, is before them. It is not with dim eye and doubting heart that the believer has to look, as into a world of darkness, when he turns his view to that which is beyond the grave. It is irradiated with heaven's own light. Christ is there in the human nature, and there to provide for and to welcome His brethren. 'I go to prepare a place for you,' He said, 'that where I am, there ye may be also.' Heaven is now truly the believer's

*home*, and not a strange land, with respect to which he can only form uncertain conjectures.

When an emigrant has left his native country, and, after struggling with the difficulties of his new residence, loses heart, and desires to return to his kindred and friends, he says to himself, in forming his resolution, 'I will go home again.' Now Christ's people are pilgrims and sojourners on earth. They hear a voice from time to time whispering in their ear, 'Arise, depart, this is not your rest.' Like the exiles in Babylon, who looked to Judea and Jerusalem as their fatherland, and rejoiced when Cyrus issued his edict that they might return, believers regard heaven as their fatherland, because their Father is there especially, and their elder Brother is there, whom they shall see and adore, and with whom they shall have undisturbed communion for ever. What could faith and hope desire or obtain better fitted to sustain them than the truth that Christ is in heaven in the human nature? Is not Christ in heaven better than Christ on earth? He Himself said to the apostles, 'If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I go unto the Father.' And so, if we loved Him as we should do, and believed in Him undoubtingly, we would feel that the certainty of being with Him, beholding Him, and partaking of the blessedness which He imparts, was far more than a compensation for all the troubles which may fall to our lot in following Him. I might say much more under this head, but the time will not permit me.

IV. I pass on, therefore, to advert very briefly to the fourth particular, viz. some of the encouragements which the ascension of Christ affords to believers to hold fast their profession.

1. And here I notice for a moment, in the first place, that the very fact of the ascension of Christ coming after the humiliation and ignominy of the cross, is one of the most powerful arguments which can be enforced to fortify His people against the assaults of their spiritual enemies, prompting them to throw off their allegiance to Him. There are two things which you will find placed side by side throughout the whole volume of revealed truth, viz. the sufferings and the subsequent glory of the Redeemer. The bruising of the serpent's head

could only be effected by the bruising of the Saviour's heel. , It pleased the Lord to bruise Him ; He hath put Him to grief : when Thou shalt make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand. He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied.' ' Because He humbled Himself, God hath highly exalted Him.' And then what is the inference from all this as affecting His people ? It is a faithful saying, ' If we be dead with Him, we shall also live with Him : if we suffer, we shall also reign with Him.' Now these passages shed a cheering light upon the path of the believer. We know by experience, that in this world we must endure suffering in some form or other, and that we must struggle in our way to the heavenly inheritance. But this is not a strange thing. On the contrary, it is what we should be prepared for. ' As Christ was, so are His people in this world.' But just as certainly as Christ ascended into heaven after His warfare was over, so certainly shall we, if we believe in Him, and love Him, and pursue the path which He has marked out for us.

And when we contrast what we may be called to suffer with what will be enjoyed in His immediate presence, must we not adopt the language of the apostle, and say, ' I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us ' ? ' I heard a voice,' says John, in the Book of Revelation, ' as it were the voice of a trumpet talking with me ; which said, Come up hither.' This is Christ's voice to His people, addressed to them from His throne on high. But there is added to it, ' In the world ye shall have tribulation ; but be faithful, and ye shall overcome, and shall sit with me upon my throne, even as I have overcome, and am set down with my Father on His throne.' So that while believers have to struggle, they are therein only like their Master. And His triumph makes theirs certain, because He is enthroned, and armed with all power to make His people victorious over all their enemies.

2. In the second place, the ascension of Christ warrants His followers to count with the fullest confidence upon experiencing heavenly sympathy. I found this remark more par-



ticularly upon the words of the text, 'My Father, and your Father; my God, and your God.' There is a depth of meaning in this language which it is easier to feel than to unfold. At present I can only allude to the subject in a few sentences. I would have you observe, then, that they are not *words* merely expressive of a general feeling of favour and kindness, but that they contain a declaration of unspeakable importance. *In a doctrinal point* of view, they teach us that all who believe in Christ have a right to claim God as their own God and Father; and also that they are privileged to regard Christ as truly their brother, bone of their bone, and flesh of their flesh. These are delightful subjects of thought, which the mind cannot contemplate closely without being improved and elevated by the very exercise. But the point which I would wish you to fix your thoughts upon at present is this, that Christ wishes you to feel the reality of His brotherhood, and to count upon it as establishing for you an interest in heaven. It is as if He had said, 'Do not think that I shall ever forget you, or cease to watch over you, and all your affairs, with the tenderest concern. I carry your nature with me to heaven. Ye are my brethren; I am your brother. Whatever affects your well-being, affects me. He that toucheth you, toucheth the apple of mine eye. The Father hath committed all power into my hand, to be put forth for you, because, as my brethren, He recognises you as His children also, the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty.' Such are some of the thoughts suggested to us by the Redeemer's words; and do they not warrant all who believe in Him to look up to heaven with the assurance that they have His sympathy? When He looked down upon Saul of Tarsus, and said to him, 'Why persecutest thou me?' did not this show that the well-being of His people lay at His very heart? Be assured of it, my believing friends. It does seem to us sometimes as if there could be no community of feeling or of interest between the holy place and this sinful world which we inhabit. But it is far otherwise. There is not a turning in your lot, there is not a trial, or trouble, or bereavement which ye have to suffer, but Christ marks it. Your tears are in His bottle; your cries are in His book. And if His sympathy does not always lead to deliverance at

the time when you would wish it, *that*, too, is ordered, because it would not be really good for you. Keep fast hold of the truth, that in heaven you have the Son of God, who is also the Man Christ Jesus, watching over all your movements, and touched with the feeling of your infirmities,—a human heart to sympathize, and divine power to help,—and then you will be able in your sorest troubles to say, ‘My heart is fixed, O Lord, my heart is fixed: Thou art my strength and my salvation.’

Now in making application of this subject, I have only time for one or two sentences.

1. In the first place, it is very obvious that those who live in this world without any thought of heavenly things, and who, if they know about Christ, have no desire to hold communion with Him exalted as He is to heaven, cannot be among His saved people. If they were among the redeemed, they would have some community of feeling with the Redeemer, and would sometimes turn their minds to the place where He reigns. But having their desires and pursuits bounded by this world, and no fixed prospect beyond, they are of the earth earthy, and their portion therefore must be that only which earth affords, until they are called away to reap for ever as they have sown.

2. In the second place, the subject which I have been handling forms a grand incentive to the people of God to be earnest and diligent in following out their heavenly calling, and in their work for Christ. Is Christ in heaven, and can your souls cleave to the dust? Is Christ in heaven, and do you make earthly good your portion? My friends, this must not be. Heaven is your home—prepare for it. Christ is there—make ready to meet Him. Seek grace to cast away the hindrances which chain you down to earth. Live more as those who have their inheritance in heaven. Thus you will show that you are Christ’s brethren. Thus you will let an ungodly world know that you feel and believe that Christ hath ascended to His Father, and your Father; to His God, and your God. Amen.

## XXXVI.

### THE FAITH OF ABEL.

‘By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts ; and by it he, being dead, yet speaketh.’—HEB. XI. 4.

**I**N the last lecture I directed your attention to the three verses which form the introduction to this interesting chapter. My object was to impress upon you the necessity, as well as the desirableness, of possessing that faith which *substantiates* and *evidences* to the mind the things which are revealed in the Word of God as pertaining both to the past and to the future. To be able to take home as realities, while many are doubting about them, those things which are certified by the testimony of God Himself, introduces us to a source of enjoyment far higher than any that is opened up from any other quarter. Fully satisfied with the continually increasing proof that the Bible is the Word of God, we can repose upon its statements with the perfect assurance that all will be verified in due time ; and thus the soul gets safe anchorage amid the tossings and vicissitudes and troubles which have to be encountered in this present sinful world.

There are many men who, if they had not the quiet rest of the Sabbath, with its privileges, would sink under the pressure of worldly business. And so, if we had not these promises of the Word which faith substantiates, we would all be as vessels on the far-off ocean without helm or chart or compass. But God has not left us in this condition. He has given us His Word to guide us on our passage from time to eternity ; and He has been pleased also to encourage us by teaching His inspired servants to record the examples of many who have gone before us, and who, by faith, have reached the haven of rest which we profess to seek as our destination. I mentioned

in the last discourse that it was my purpose to consider at greater length the statements made in this chapter, than those which have previously come before us in the epistle. The apostle has given us a catalogue of the most remarkable men who are spoken of in the earlier part of the Old Testament history,—of those who may be called the fathers of the Old Testament Church ; and I would wish to direct your attention to them very specially. As was mentioned before, the catalogue might have been much extended ; but we must be satisfied with what the apostle was commissioned to write.

The text, then, lies at present in ver. 4: ‘By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts ; and by it he, being dead, yet speaketh.’ We may place beside the statement of the apostle what we read in the Book of Genesis :—‘In process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord. And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock, and of the fat thereof. And the Lord had respect unto Abel, and to his offering : but unto Cain, and his offering, He had not respect.’ The apostle gives us a commentary upon the words of Moses ; and it may be well said, in connection with this, that one part of the divine Word sheds light upon another. The points which we have to consider, in illustrating the text, are—the character of Abel *generally*, with the circumstances in which he was placed ; his faith *specially*, as exhibited in his offering ; God’s approval of him, and of his offering ; and then the great lessons which his history teaches us.

I. In the first place, we have to consider the character of Abel generally. This subject is invested with great interest. It carries us back to the very infancy of our race, and brings us into the first family from which we are all descended. The Bible does not reveal much to us of the state of man in paradise, beyond the mere facts that he was framed in the image of God, and surrounded with all the elements of blessedness. We come too soon to know him when, as a fallen creature, he had brought down upon him the malediction of his Creator, and the penalty of a broken covenant, which is

death. It is beyond the sacred precincts of the garden of the Lord that we have to look at the history of Abel.

I think it is very obvious that we must trace back the origin of sacrifice to the divine appointment, and conclude that when Adam was *driven* out of Paradise, as he was taught to look for redemption through the seed of the woman, he was also instructed to have recourse to animal sacrifices, as pointing to the great sacrifice which was to be offered when the serpent should have his head crushed in bruising the heel of the promised seed. This redemption had become the object of desire to Abel, and the hope of it had taken full possession of his heart. His life accordingly had been framed with reference to it, as implying a restoration to paradise, and to the favour of God, and communion with Him. There is not much said of him in the Scripture ; but what is said is most honourable to his character. Our Lord designates him the *righteous* Abel. And the Apostle John says, ' Let us not be like Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him ? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's *righteous*.' We have no means of deciding how old Abel was when he fell a victim to his brother's fury. Neither can we conjecture even how many of the human race were then living. It might be supposed from what is said, Genesis v., and in the end of chap. iv., that Cain and Abel were the only male descendants of Adam at the time when the terrible deed was perpetrated. But there is no good ground for such a supposition. There were in all likelihood many branches of the original family spread abroad here and there, although they are not noticed in the sacred narrative. And this opinion is strengthened by what is recorded in the fifth chapter, that after the death of Abel, ' Adam begat a son in his own likeness, after his image, and called his name Seth ; and that after the birth of Seth, he lived eight hundred years, and begat sons and daughters.' Now you will observe in the whole list which is given of the patriarchs before the flood, that only one of their descendants is named ; while of *them all* it is said that they begat sons and daughters, by whom the world was peopled. And the reason of this distinction between one and the rest in all the families seems to be, to mark out the line in which

the promises were to be fulfilled, and thus to make a separation between the Church of God and the world, which sunk into unbelief and wickedness. The line of promise, then, we may suppose, seemed to run through Abel, who, on that account, may have been an object of hatred to his brother, even as Jacob afterwards was to Esau. And this may furnish an interpretation of the words of the first mother, when she said, on the occasion of the birth of Seth, 'God hath appointed me another seed instead of Abel, whom Cain slew.' But these remarks are somewhat digressive. The point which I wish to notice is, that before Abel was murdered there were very likely many offshoots from the first family, different in character from him whom our Lord calls *the righteous Abel*. Among these, this believer in the promises, and holy and consistent man, may have endeavoured to keep alive the knowledge of God and of duty, as his father Adam had taught him. And we can easily conceive that his efforts may have been repelled with scorn by some, and regarded with enmity by others. But I am speaking merely upon supposition; and although it would not be difficult to draw a picture here, it would not perhaps tend to edify. I shall therefore take the words of our Lord in describing Abel as *righteous*, and the words of His apostle, above quoted, in calling *his works righteous*, as the basis on which we are warranted to refer to him, and to his conduct. Now there are two senses in which a man may be called righteous. He is so in a *legal* sense, when the law of God has no demand upon him; and he is so in a *relative* sense, when he discharges all the duties of his station, so that none of his fellow-men can bring a charge against him.

In the *absolute* sense of the word, there is no man on earth righteous. 'There is none righteous, no, not one. *All* have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.' But with respect to the *legal* righteousness, *that* has been provided for by the grace of God. There is a righteousness of God which is unto all, and upon all, who believe in Jesus Christ. In Him, as their substitute, believers find full acceptance with God, and have all the exactions of the law answered. So that, as the apostle says, 'What the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God did, sending His own Son, in the like-

ness of sinful flesh : that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.' Every believer in Christ is justified, *i.e.* declared to be righteous in virtue of his connection with Christ. And in this sense, as I shall have to remark more at large afterwards, Abel was righteous, while Cain was not.

But then, where the legal righteousness is enjoyed, there is also the *relative* righteousness. Men justified freely by the grace of God, live to the glory of God. They do not live so as to earn the title of being perfect. They sin every day, but their spots are the spots of God's children ; they come short, but they have the spirit of repentance ; they walk humbly with God.

Now Abel had this kind of righteousness also ; for the apostle says, '*his deeds* were righteous.' And may it not have been that when, by his holy life, he made Cain envious of him, and when, by endeavouring to bring his brother over to the reception of the humbling doctrine of acceptance with God through faith in the promised Saviour, he excited more the enmity of the natural heart,—may it not have been thus that the fratricide, stung by the rejection of his offering, was stirred to do the deed which has made his name execrable in all ages ?

At all events, we have the fact announced that Abel *was* righteous ; and the significant fact placed side by side with it, that he *lived righteously* ; and because of this was slain. It is with good reason, then, that Abel may be called the *first martyr*. He bore witness to the reality of the divine promises. He rebuked the ungodly by living in the fear of God ; and on this account he was hated and murdered. Thus there began in the very first age of the world that manifest enmity of the children of the wicked one to the children of God, which found its greatest illustration on Calvary, but which has never ceased, even to the present day. 'Marvel not,' said Christ to His disciples, 'although the world hate you. It hated me before it hated you. If ye were of the world, the world would love its own : but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you.'

II. But I must pass on to consider, next, the faith of Abel

specially, as exhibited in his offering. Now we must place him here in contrast with his brother Cain. 'By faith,' says the apostle in the text, 'Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain.' When you read the brief account which is given of the procedure of the two brothers in the Old Testament history, you do not at once perceive wherein the difference between the value of their offerings consisted. Cain was a tiller of the ground, and he 'brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord.' He evidently believed in the existence of God, of his own dependence upon Him, and of the obligation which lay upon him to honour the giver of all by consecrating to Him a portion of what He had bestowed. The fruits of the earth which, by his industry, he had raised, seemed to form an appropriate offering.

Abel, again, who had betaken himself to the shepherd life, brought of the firstlings of his flock, and of the fat thereof, as his sacrifice. *He* also gave of the best he had. There can be no doubt that he could have easily presented an offering of the fruits of the earth similar to Cain's; but he made the firstlings of his flock his offering. And it was more excellent than Cain's. Now wherefore was it so? It cannot be affirmed, in accordance with the general tenor of the Scripture, that *in itself* the one offering was more valuable than the other. The great difference *externally* lay in this, that living creatures were slain and laid upon the altar in the one case, while in the other the mere products of the earth were presented. But we are taught largely in the Scripture that there is no *intrinsic* worth in one kind of offering as contrasted with another, especially that there is no peculiar excellence in animal sacrifices to make them acceptable, apart from the feelings and dispositions of those by whom they are offered. Thus you read in Ps. 1: 'I will not reprove thee for thy sacrifices, or thy burnt-offerings, to have been continually before me. I will take no bullock out of thy house, nor he-goats out of thy folds: for every beast of the forest is mine, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof. Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats? Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto



the Most High.' And similar to this is the language of Isaiah: 'To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me? saith the Lord: I am full of the burnt-offerings of rams, and the fat of fed beasts; and I delight not in the blood of bullocks, or of lambs, or of he-goats. When ye come to appear before me, who hath required this at your hand, to tread my courts? Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes.' Most manifest it is, then, that in estimating the relative excellence of the offerings of Cain and Abel, we must not make that of the latter rest upon the mere circumstance that he sacrificed of the *firstlings of his flock with the fat thereof*. We must enter more deeply into the subject than this. And the apostle's statement enables us to do so. It was *through the faith* of Abel that his sacrifice was more excellent than Cain's. But, as has been remarked already, it is obvious that Cain had faith, in one sense of the word. He believed that there is a God, and that He is to be worshipped and acknowledged as the Creator and Disposer of all things, else he would not have come at all with any kind of offering in his hand to place it upon an altar erected for the service of God. There must therefore have been something that formed a distinction between the faith of Cain and the faith of Abel. And it is not very difficult to perceive what this was. If you suppose that animal sacrifice was a divine institution, intended from the first, as I have said before, to direct the minds of men to the necessity of an atonement for their guilt, and to prefigure the sacrifice of Christ, then you have Abel, when he brought his offering, falling in with the divine arrangement, presenting himself as a guilty creature, but at the same time as a humble penitent, before the Judge of all, and seeking pardon and favour on the ground of the divine mercy, as intimated when God said, 'The seed of the woman shall bruise the head of the serpent.' We are not to suppose that Abel had the whole mystery of redemption revealed to him, any more than those had who believed from his time downward to the accomplishment of the scheme of redemption on Calvary. But we do suppose that he had been taught that without shedding of blood there is no remission of sin, that he believed this and

acquiesced in it as God's appointment; and that it was an expression of his faith in this which led him to come as he did with the firstlings of his flock as a sacrifice. On the other hand, Cain appears to have had no respect to this divine arrangement, although he must have known it. He approached God's altar, not as a guilty being whose sin needed to be atoned for, and whose frame should be that of penitence and self-abasement, but merely to render an act of homage to the Supreme. Very likely it is that he imagined in the pride of his heart, that he offered all which could be justly exacted from him,—that he had a duty to perform, and that having performed it, nothing more was requisite. These remarks, then, point out a great difference between the faith of the two worshippers, and bring out very clearly the distinction between the sacrifice of the one as more excellent than that of the other. It may just be added here, that we need not suppose—or rather we must not suppose—that this was the first occasion on which either Cain or Abel sacrificed. They had been separated in the pursuit of their respective callings, and had separately performed their acts of worship. But at this time they came together, perhaps to the place where their father usually worshipped, each of them exhibiting the distinguishing characteristic of his mind and heart by that which he brought along with him. It was in one respect an unhappy meeting, as we shall have to remark; but it was an instructive one, at the same time, as setting forth so near the commencement of the world's history an example of the way in which Jehovah may be served with acceptance, and of the service which He will not receive nor bless. And this leads me to allude to some practical lessons suggested to us by this part of the subject, two of which I would notice.

1. In the first place, it is very plain that *mere formal worship* is neither pleasing to God, nor profitable to those who perform it. But there is much of it in the visible Church of Christ. Many people pray, just because they feel that it is their duty so to do, and read the Bible, and observe divine ordinances, because they would be troubled by their conscience if they neglected these appointments of God. It is not because they have any relish for these exercises that they per-

form them, but because they would feel uncomfortable if they were to set them aside altogether. They have a belief in the existence of God, and in the truth of their responsibility to Him, even as Cain had; but in their religion there is very little more than this. They have not the faith which brings the heart into communion with God, and which teaches at once love and reverence. Let us see to it, my friends, that we do not make shipwreck upon this rock of formalism. It was the great error of the Pharisees. They did everything according to outward form; they gave to God in the way of service all which the law required, even to the very letter; but they withheld that which was necessary to form the incense to their sacrifices, the grateful and loving homage of the heart. In vain therefore they made broad their phylacteries, and paid tithes of mint and anise and cummin, and offered up long prayers. He who searcheth the heart detected their formality and hypocrisy, and counted their worship an abomination. To pray rightly, and to worship with acceptance, we must have a humble and believing heart.

2. In the second place, there is a solemn warning to be drawn from the passage before us, with respect to the condition of those who either deny the doctrine of Christ's atonement altogether, or who put such glosses upon it as to obscure its value and significance. In our times there is prevalent what is called a broad view of religion, which, under the disguise of a false liberality, makes all forms of belief very much alike, and counts as of no consequence those doctrines of the Bible which *we* have been accustomed to regard as lying at the very basis of the scheme of salvation. Thus, for example, a man may be a Unitarian, as the denomination is called, professing to believe the Scriptures and to worship God the Creator of all, while he thinks that nothing else is necessary to the obtaining of forgiveness of his sin than confession and repentance, and that by his honest endeavours to obey the law of God he will obtain His favour. And as he lives, upon the whole, respectably, and is not destitute of benevolence, those are stigmatized as fanatical and uncharitable who express any doubt as to his spiritual and eternal well-being. But the text puts the matter before us in a very

different light, and so does the whole tenor of the Bible. Cain, in the presentation of his offering, seems to be the type of those who deny the doctrine of atonement by the shedding of the blood of Christ. I would not be understood to mean that they have his cruel heart and vindictive temper. Far from it. But they think, *like him*, that they can serve God, and get acceptance with Him, without a sacrifice which involves blood-shedding; and so, like him, they must be rejected; while the humble believer in the atoning sacrifice of Christ, who feels his guilt, and casts the burden of it upon the all-sufficient Mediator, gets a hearing for his prayers and acceptance for his worship. This is not a subject of speculation; it is a question of great practical interest. 'You who sometimes were far off,' says the apostle, 'are brought nigh *by the blood of Christ.*' 'We have redemption *through His blood*, even the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of the grace of God.' And if we forget that we need redemption, if we make light of the atonement of Christ, or if we seek the favour of God through any other channel, we are assuredly lost, 'for there is salvation in no other; neither is there any other name given under heaven among men, whereby we can be saved, but the name of Jesus.'

III. But I come now to consider the third topic which the text suggests, viz. God's approval of Abel and his offering, while He rejected Cain and his. The words of the Old Testament narrative are, 'The Lord had respect unto Abel, and to his offering: but unto Cain, and to his offering, He had not respect.' And in the text, 'Abel obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts.' We are not informed how the divine approval was given to Abel's offering, so as to make the difference palpable between it and Cain's. The common opinion is, and it is very probable, as well as in accordance with what we elsewhere read in the Scripture, that fire from heaven consumed 'the firstlings of the flock, and the fat thereof;' whereas Cain's fruits were suffered to burn away in the fire which *he himself* had kindled. We get many illustrations from the Scripture bearing upon this subject. Thus, when the worship of Jehovah in the tabernacle was first publicly begun in

the wilderness, and the burnt-offering was laid upon the altar, and when Moses and Aaron blessed the people, 'the glory of the Lord appeared unto all the people. And there came a fire out from before the Lord, and consumed upon the altar the burnt-offering and the fat: which when all the people saw, they shouted, and fell on their faces.' And so, when Gideon presented his offering, and laid what he had brought upon the naked rock, the angel of the Lord put forth the staff that was in his hand, and touched the flesh and the unleavened cakes; and there rose up fire out of the rock, and consumed the flesh and the unleavened cakes. In like manner, at the dedication of the temple, 'fire came down from heaven, and consumed the burnt-offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of the Lord filled the house.' (2 Chron. vii. 1.) And a similar demonstration was given when Elijah, contending with the priests of Baal, sacrificed to Jehovah on Mount Carmel.

It is from such incidents as these that the conclusion has been drawn, that it was most probably by the sign of fire from heaven that God testified His acceptance of Abel and his sacrifice. At all events, it must have been in a way marked and visible, else Cain could not have perceived it, and the malignant passions, which as yet *only slumbered* in his breast, would not have been roused to impel him to the crime of fratricide. With Cain's procedure, however, we have not here to do. The chief point which we have to consider is the statement that Abel obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; or, as it is more briefly given by Moses, that 'God had respect unto Abel, and to his offering.' It is a point of great importance, both *doctrinally* and *practically*. As a doctrinal point, you require to observe the order of the words, which is substantially, although not literally, the same both in the Old Testament and the New. Abel was *accepted personally* before his *offering* was accepted. He was the righteous Abel, *i.e.* righteous or justified before God, previously to the testimony which at this particular period was borne to him in connection with his sacrifice. He had believed the divine testimony before; he had worshipped with acceptance before, although not so manifestly. He had been the first, after his father Adam, who was received into the new

family of the redeemed, who were to be gathered out from among the fallen race. The Lord looked upon His believing and dutiful child, and manifested His approval of his offering. Now this view of the subject is not at all in harmony with the feelings of the carnal mind. The order which commends itself to men generally is, that the offering procures acceptance for the offerer. But the divine method is, that the person of the offerer is first accepted, and then the offering. Abel came as a believer, a child of God, humble, loving, and faithful, although conscious of personal guilt and unworthiness; and the Lord looked upon His child, and was pleased with what he brought. Cain came as an alien, and along with his offering was rejected. Notice the difference. It is necessary for the sinner first to be reconciled to God, and admitted into His family, by believing in Christ, before he can render Him any acceptable service. The two mites of the widow were of greater account than all the precious gifts of the wealthy which were cast into the treasury. And so the loving service of a true believer is of far more value, although it may outwardly be of little importance, than the greater works of those who are still among the rebels and aliens.

But then, again, *practically*, the text speaks to us. There are many under the light of the gospel who persist in thinking that they can somehow make God their debtor, and purchase His favour. Alms, benevolences, prayers, and other services will secure for them favour on high. Oh, friends, stop, speak, and learn your error. Do not think that you can purchase eternal life by your gifts and services. It has been bought already at a greater price—the blood of Christ the Son of God. Your first concern is to humble yourselves before God, submitting to His way of salvation, and content to follow Christ. Let this be done, and then come and offer your gifts. If you do so, your gifts will be as a sweet-smelling sacrifice, with which God for Christ's sake is well pleased.

IV. Now, in conclusion, I have to speak for a little of some of the great lessons which Abel's history teaches us. 'By his faith, being dead, he yet speaketh,' the apostle tells us;

that is to say, there is something to be learnt from his life and death profitable to men in every age.

1. In the first place, Abel's death reminds us of the strength and steadfastness of his faith, and thus gives us a *lesson of rebuke*. He had not a large amount of knowledge spread out before him, neither had he *many* exceeding great and precious promises to animate him. Dim was the prospect which he had to contemplate in the future, as compared with us. But he took hold of the one promise which his father had taught him; he believed that by sacrifice there was to be restoration to the favour of God, and in that faith he lived and died. Now how many are there among us who, with all the clearness which the successive revelations of God have given to the subject, yet stand aloof from Christ, and rather look with wonder at the promises than take them to their heart! From the grave of Abel there comes to all such the voice of expostulation, 'Believe, and live; accept the great propitiation, and rejoice in it; look with a steady eye to the promises, for they are sure and steadfast.'

2. In the second place, Abel's death illustrates the fact, that faith and righteousness may not always have such an issue in this world as might be expected. It would seem as if in the very commencement of the struggle between the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman, *i.e.* between the unregenerate and the children of God, the Lord had designed to teach us this lesson. Might it not have been thought that Cain, in whose heart the murderous passion lay, would be destroyed, and Abel the friend of God preserved? But it was not so. And why? Just to teach the Church, from her very infancy, that persecutions and troubles will be permitted to assail her before she reaches the better state which God has provided for her. We read in Abel's history an epitome of the history of the Church—wrong triumphing for a season, and truth apparently destroyed; but yet truth still living and speaking. And so it is with individual believers.

3. In the third place, from the death of Abel we get a glimpse of what is meant by *immortality*. There are two kinds of immortality. There is that which some men foolishly covet, desiring to have their names transmitted to future ages.

Some have got this accomplished by violence and rapine and bloodshed. They will have a history while the world lasts. But Abel's immortality is of a higher order. The Lord Jesus Christ calls him the righteous Abel, has already accepted of him as such, and will as such acknowledge him at last. Thus the name of the first martyr has come down to us through all past ages, and is written in heaven. And although it may not hold good of every believer that he will be borne in mind long after he has left this earthly scene, yet it will be found that he is not forgotten. His name is in the book of life, and Christ will say at last, 'Come, faithful servant, and enter into the joy of thy Lord.' Amen.



## XXXVII.

### CHRIST'S SERMON ON THE MOUNT, AND THE POOR IN SPIRIT.

‘ And seeing the multitudes, He went up into a mountain ; and when He was set, His disciples came unto Him : and He opened His mouth, and taught them, saying, Blessed are the poor in spirit : for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.’—MATT. v. 1-3.

SINCE the series of lectures on the Epistle to the Hebrews was concluded, I have not entered upon another particular course, but have directed your attention to passages selected from different parts of Scripture. It is the opinion of many, however, and I confess it is my own, that there is advantage got by pursuing a regular series which cannot otherwise be obtained. Thus, to say nothing more, it must be obvious to every one that we gain a more complete knowledge of the *whole* of God's revealed will when we examine the Bible, or any considerable portion of it, continuously, verse by verse, than when we take out and consider a separate passage from this or that book which may strike us more particularly at the time. We are brought in contact, by the former method, with important truths which would have altogether escaped our notice on a mere cursory reading ; and indeed it is only when we investigate minutely that we perceive the fulness and the richness of those spiritual stores which are treasured up for our instruction in the Word of God.

It is my purpose, then, at present, to enter on an examination of our Lord's sermon on the Mount, which forms one of the most interesting portions of the New Testament Scriptures. There is not any peculiar difficulty in the exposition of it,—far less, indeed, than there is in opening up the meaning of most of the epistles. Addressed as it was to a promiscuous multitude, who had been accustomed to a very different kind of teaching, it is plain and practical ; yet there is a beauty and

depth in it, when we study it carefully, which make us feel that we are truly listening to the words of Him 'who spake as never man spake.'

One or two general observations may be offered in the way of preface, before I proceed to comment upon the words of the text.

1. In the first place, it is to be noticed, and some have wondered at it, that our Lord does not make direct reference in this discourse to the great end of His mission, which was to be accomplished by His offering Himself a sacrifice for sin. This, however, He unfolded gradually to His disciples afterwards, and more and more clearly as the eventful period drew nigh. He presented truth to them by degrees, as their minds were able to bear it. The new wine was not to be poured into old bottles. We find, in fact, that when He did begin to prepare the twelve for His approaching sufferings and death, they were so startled by the announcement, that they could not look upon it as a reality. Peter, it is said, took Him and began to rebuke Him, saying, 'Be it far from Thee, Lord; this shall not be unto Thee.' And if He had referred at the commencement of His ministry to the ignominy of the cross as awaiting Him, we can easily perceive that He would thus have been raising *unnecessarily* an obstacle to the reception by the people of the other important truths which He desired to impress upon their minds. So that it is chiefly to the great distinctive qualities of heart and mind and life by which His followers were to be known that He summons their attention in this remarkable discourse, making every point of it so level to their comprehension that none could fail to understand its general import.

2. In the second place, we can perceive the harmony that exists between the lessons inculcated in the sermon on the Mount, and what had been the leading subject of His own *previous* preaching, and of the preaching of His forerunner John the Baptist. 'In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judea, and saying, Repent ye; for the kingdom of heaven is at hand;' and 'Bring forth fruits meet for repentance.' And when Jesus entered on His public ministry, we read, that 'from that time He began to

preach, and to say, Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'

The peculiar characteristic of the gospel as altogether a spiritual dispensation was thus made manifest, when repentance was enjoined as lying at the very entrance to the enjoyment of its blessings. And it was practically to show what really constitutes repentance, what a vast change must be wrought on the heart and conduct of a true penitent, of one who belongs to the spiritual kingdom, that our Lord delivered the beatitudes, and expounded the law, and enforced all the duties which are laid down in this most comprehensive summary of practical religion.

3. In the third place, we would take an erroneous view of the nature of the sermon on the Mount, if we were to suppose that the truths proclaimed in it were different from those which were prescribed for the guidance of the Church under the Old Testament.

The persons and qualities pronounced blessed by our Lord were all commended by the law and the prophets. But the scribes, the public expounders of the law, had so obscured and corrupted its meaning, and had so perverted it by vain traditions, that when He set the divine requirements before the people in all their purity He did seem to preach to them what was wholly new. But the only *real* distinction which can be drawn between His teaching and that of the *inspired men* who revealed the will of God under the Old Testament, lies in this, that He unfolded with *greater clearness* the spirituality and comprehensiveness of the moral law than they did. He could not so properly be said to have brought new truths to light, as to have caused the light to shine more brightly and significantly upon the old. This we shall have ample opportunity to show, from time to time, as we advance in the examination of what He taught.

4. And, in the fourth place, in endeavouring to arrive at the full meaning of His words, we must not be contented to place ourselves, as it were, in the situation of those to whom they were originally addressed, and to consider merely what interpretation they would have naturally put upon them. We must remember that the whole Bible is *one*; and that as the

New Testament is the key to the Old, so one part of the New Testament must be employed to illustrate another part, if we would ascertain what is the *whole truth* to be received by us. And it is thus only that the various maxims laid down in the sermon on the Mount will be seen in all the force and beauty by which they are truly characterized.

It is not necessary that I should advert to the many discussions that have been raised and carried on with regard to the question, whether the sermon on the Mount recorded by Matthew, and the briefer form of it given by Luke, are to be considered as the same discourse, delivered at the same time and under the same circumstances, or as discourses delivered at different times. I would regard them as different discourses. And certainly there is nothing improbable in the supposition that, although they resemble each other very closely, they were spoken on different occasions. The truths which they contain are of the greatest importance, as setting forth the spiritual nature of the kingdom which Christ was to establish, and He might therefore think it expedient to repeat them again and again, even when many who had heard them before were present. And this view is corroborated by the fact, that in several parts of Luke's Gospel there are longer and shorter repetitions of passages from the sermon on the Mount, as being most appropriate to convey the instruction which our Lord on these separate occasions sought to impart. And the slight shades of difference between those parts which Luke gives and the continuous discourse as reported by Matthew only enable us the more certainly to ascertain the precise meaning of the whole.

With regard to the *particular place* where the discourse was delivered, there has been diversity of opinion, as might have been expected, since the name of the Mount is not given in the Scripture. The commonly received opinion has been that it was on one of the eminences that lie at the foot of Mount Tabor that our Lord sat. But of these there are so many, that this leaves the subject very much where it was. One thing seems to be certain, that the Mount was not very far distant from Capernaum. For we read (Matt. viii.), that when Jesus came down from the Mount, followed by the multitude, a leper

came to Him, beseeching Him to heal him; and when He had performed this work of mercy, He then entered into Capernaum. A modern writer—one of the highest authorities upon all subjects connected with the geography of Palestine—says that in the neighbourhood of the Lake of Gennesaret, and not far from Capernaum, there are no fewer than twelve hills, from any of which the sermon on the Mount might have been delivered. It would be altogether an arbitrary decision, then, in such a case, to fix upon one of these rather than another. But although the precise spot cannot be pointed out where these precious words were spoken, all travellers unite in testifying that the whole surrounding scene is one of the fairest in nature. ‘Even the Jewish historian Josephus,’ says one writer, ‘breaks out into enthusiasm as he describes the landscape of Gennesaret. “Wonderful is the country that lies over against this lake, both in beauty and in fertility. Its soil is so fruitful that all kinds of trees can grow upon it, and the temper of the air agrees well with all. There flourishes the walnut-tree, the palm-tree; fig-trees, also, and olives grow near them. One may call this place the triumph of nature, where it forces those plants that are naturally enemies to one another to agree together. It is a happy contention of the seasons, as if every one of them laid claims to this country.” In this locality the Saviour spoke the sermon on the Mount. If we realize the beautiful landscape, and the solemn calm of early morn when it was spoken, we must feel how all this must have deepened the impression which the discourse produced.’ ‘The whole scene (it is said) has about it something earnest and sad—something attractive, as well as sublime. The cloudless heaven above Him, the rural region around, formed a temple of nature; and no synagogue, not even the temple of Jerusalem, could make on the minds of the hearers so solemn an impression. Here was nothing of that formality which characterized the disquisitions of the Jewish teachers. He sat down upon the mountain, and fixing His eyes on the disciples standing next before Him, at once began: “Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”’ (Tholuck, p. 56.) Now what could have formed a more appropriate introduction to this discourse, which seems to have been the

first of any length which He delivered to so large an audience,—what could have been more suitable, both to the nature of His own heavenly mission and to the condition and circumstances of His hearers, than these beautiful words of blessing! And although in an indirect way, yet how completely were they calculated to overthrow the notion which generally prevailed, that the appearing of Messiah was to usher in a jubilee of earthly splendour and victory and prosperity to the long oppressed posterity of Abraham! There is no celebration of the warrior's praises here; there is no promise of deliverance from the Roman yoke, and the establishment of a kingdom which should far outshine that of David and Solomon in the extent of its dominions, the stability of its power, and the glory of its happy citizens. To such dreams as these, on which the minds of the Jewish people at that time vainly fed, there is no favour shown by Him who was truly to 'sit upon the throne of David, and in His kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice for ever.' He draws the people away from earthly fancies, and seeks to raise them to the contemplation and love of spiritual and heavenly realities, when He singles out the poor in spirit, the mourners, the meek, the pure in heart, and pronounces them the truly blessed.

Now let us turn our attention to this first of the beatitudes: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.' What is necessary in expounding these words is, first, to ascertain who are to be understood by the poor in spirit; and then, secondly, to show in what their blessedness consists—'Theirs is the kingdom of heaven.'

I. In the first place, then, let us endeavour to ascertain who those are who are here called 'the poor in spirit.'

Now as in the ordinary concerns of life the best things have their counterfeits, so that care must be taken to distinguish between the genuine and the false, even so in every department of religion there are counterfeits which many people are in danger of mistaking for those qualities and services which the Word of God enjoins and approves. And with respect to the Christian graces, the cultivation of which is indispensable as an evidence of our relationship to Christ,

and of our having been baptized into His spirit, there is a peculiar necessity for our being upon our guard, lest we be deceived by appearances. For it is not only the case that every particular grace has its corresponding counterfeit, which hypocrisy takes advantage of to serve its dark purposes, but there is such a resemblance between the graces of the Spirit and certain qualities which are the fruit of the natural disposition of men, that we may not be able to discriminate between them, even when there is no design whatever to practise deception upon us. In order, then, that we may rightly understand the words of our Lord in the text, it may be well to consider them first negatively, and then positively, —that is to say, first, to point out certain classes who are not the poor in spirit, although in certain respects they may bear some resemblance to them; and then, secondly, to show who they really are.

Now I may mention, generally, at the outset, that those commentators are obviously wrong who regard the poverty of spirit here spoken of as synonymous with *humility*. That they are most intimately connected together, there can be no doubt; and that a man cannot be poor in spirit who is not humble, must be at once admitted. But they are not identical. Although there cannot be poverty of spirit without humility, there may be humility where there is not poverty of spirit. The holy angels are represented as humble, veiling their faces with their wings in the immediate presence of the Eternal; but there is nothing in their condition to call them to cherish poverty of spirit. The Lord Jesus Himself, the Holy One of God, was humble, and is set before us as the perfect pattern of humility; but He was not, He *could not* be, 'poor in spirit.' 'Take my yoke upon you,' He says, 'and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart;' but 'the lowliness of heart,' which is just another form of expression for humility, is different from 'poverty of spirit,' because the expression implies, in him who cherishes it, the consciousness of some want; and this could not be the case of Him 'in whom dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.'

1. But passing from this, I notice more particularly, first, that 'the poor in spirit' spoken of in the text are *not* persons

of a mean and servile and grovelling spirit. This is the idea which in common language we associate with the words, 'a poor-spirited man;' but it is not at all the idea which we must connect with the words of the text. A man of mean and servile spirit will do many things certainly which show that he is not puffed up with a sense of *self-importance*; but they show as conclusively that he is dead to the sense of *self-respect*. Now self-respect is a feeling which every Christian is bound to cultivate. It is altogether different from pride. It is the feeling which prompts a man to act in a manner becoming his position and his dignity as a man and a Christian. It is, in other words, what Paul exhorts the Philippians to manifest, when he says to them, 'Let your conversation be as becometh the gospel of Christ.' And we all know that we have gained an important point, when, in attempting to improve the condition of those who have sunk deeply into moral degradation, we can awaken in them the lost feeling of *self-respect*. Great part of our work is accomplished when we have succeeded in doing this. It is because he is destitute of self-respect that the mean-spirited man cringes and bows with servility to those who are placed above him in rank, appears to respect all their opinions as if they were unquestionably true; yea, submits to do many things at their bidding which his own conscience condemns, because he is afraid to provoke their displeasure. It was this meanness of spirit that led many to forsake Christ when the days of persecution came; and it is the same thing which prevents many still from venturing any farther as His followers than they can safely do with the approval of those on whom they are dependent. I need not say more to make it plain that 'the poor in spirit,' whom the Saviour pronounces blessed, are not mean-spirited persons, or persons destitute of self-respect.

2. In the second place, I remark that the poor in spirit are not to be regarded as belonging necessarily to the same class with those whose mental energies and activity have been crushed by unsuccessful struggles and disappointed hopes. In a state of society like our own, where every man who would raise himself is engaged in an almost perpetual struggle,



and where he is doomed to experience many unlooked for disappointments and losses, it is not an uncommon thing to meet with persons who, not being of a temperament to contend against the difficulties which are inseparable from worldly business, lose heart altogether when they are overtaken by any great and unexpected reverse, and sink into a kind of morbid inactivity, from which, for a time, it is impossible to arouse them. All the lights are struck out of their picture of life, and the whole is overspread with gloom and sadness. Amusements and recreations, which they used to relish, become distasteful. The conversation of friends that formerly interested and cheered them, has now no attraction for them. Even the quiet and gladdening enjoyments of home, which were wont to be so pleasing and soothing to the mind when the daily toil was over, lose their power to light up the darkness that has settled down upon it. In a word, the world and everything connected with it seems to have been stript of all interest, and to have inscribed upon it, Truly 'all is vanity and vexation of spirit.' Now if in any such case as I have just described a man should exhibit, along with the depression of spirit which has been produced, some manifestation of a desire to attend more to the claims of religion than he was accustomed to do before, the seriousness of his whole deportment will give more than its due weight to this apparent change, and will procure for him the credit of being much more deeply impressed by religious feelings than he may be in reality. He may, in short, without ceasing to be worldly at heart, seem to be truly one of those who are poor in spirit. And not unfrequently, as we all know, it is just by such a process of discipline that men are driven out of their worldliness, and constrained to take shelter in the gospel refuge. But what I would have you notice is, that you are not justified in concluding, either in your own case or that of others, that dejection of mind and disrelish to worldly enjoyments, when accompanied with some indications of religious feeling, are identical with *poverty of spirit*. When Ahab was struck down by the word of Elijah as by the sword of the Spirit, a great outward change came over him. He fasted, and lay in sackcloth, and went softly, and appeared to be the humble

penitent, instead of the cruel and impious tyrant. But there was no real change of heart; and if he did not afterwards perpetrate such crimes as he had formerly committed, he yet lived and died with all his sins upon his head. And even so it may not be a gracious operation at all, but the influence of feelings and motives altogether of worldly origin, that lay men low for a season, and impart to them an appearance of deep seriousness and submissiveness of spirit.

3. In the third place, I observe that the persons referred to in the text are not necessarily those who are *literally* poor, even when they seem to bear their poverty without murmuring and discontent.

The popish expositors of Scripture take a view of our Lord's words which corresponds to some of the important arrangements of their own system. They suppose that one of the best illustrations that can be obtained of what is to be understood by 'the poor in spirit,' is to be found in the case of their monks and nuns, who forsake the pomps and vanities of the world, and, under a vow of voluntary poverty, consecrate their lives to the service of the Church. Apart, however, from the circumstance that all monastic institutions stand opposed to the spirit of Christianity, it may be safely said, that from their very nature they are inconsistent with true poverty of spirit. For the idea that there is something meritorious connected with the vows and penances and services of their inmates, lies at the very foundation of them. And under the sombre garb, and the subdued look and tone of these devotees, there is almost of necessity engendered the pride of self-righteousness, for which the Bible certainly has no blessing. There is nothing either desirable or commendable in literal poverty, considered in itself. A poor man, the very poorest, may possess the dignity of being a child of God, and rich in faith. But it is not his poverty that makes him so; it is his being in Christ, and having the spirit of Christ in him. And the rich man, on the other hand, may be poor in spirit, and an heir of the kingdom of heaven.

Having thus seen, on a negative view of the subject, who the poor in spirit *are not*, viz. that they are not persons of a mean and grovelling spirit, and that they are not necessarily

identical with those who labour under deep depression of mind, or are literally poor, I would now proceed to look at the subject positively, and mention in some respects what they really are.

1. In the first place, when we speak of a man as 'poor in spirit,' this evidently implies that he labours under *felt spiritual wants*. Whatever may be his condition in life, his *soul* is ill at ease. He feels that there are certain things necessary to his well-being which he cannot procure for himself, and without which he must be lost for ever. He is God's accountable creature, and as such is bound to render Him a willing and a perfect obedience; but this he feels he has not strength to do. He is placed under the law of God, and is required to obey it in every point; but he is conscious to himself of numberless violations of it. He cannot enjoy peace and blessedness unless he has a sense of the favour and love of God toward him; and this he cannot venture to lay claim to. He knows that it is his duty to guard his heart against the secret advances of sin, and to have all his desires and affections regulated according to the example of Christ; but he feels that with all his efforts, and all his purposes, and all his attempts to exercise a control over the movements of his heart, it turns aside like the deceitful bow, and temporizes with sin and with the allurements of the wicked one. Altogether, then, he goes about conscious that he wants righteousness, and strength and spirituality of affection, and the favour of God, in whose favour alone there is life and blessedness. As I had occasion not long ago to put the case before you in another light, he feels that he is God's debtor to an incalculable amount, and that he has nothing wherewith to discharge the debt. This, then, is spiritual poverty under one aspect.

2. In the second place, 'the poor in spirit' referred to in the text are those who feel that their wants and troubles are for the most part self-caused. I say *for the most part*, because it is not necessary here to dwell upon the fact that we all inherit a corrupt nature; although it may be stated, in passing, that there is no man truly under the teaching of the Spirit who does not acknowledge and bewail his natural pollution as

a fallen creature in the sight of God. But it is with regard to actual shortcomings and violations of the law of God in heart and life, and neglect of self-control which might have been exercised, that I speak at present. Now every man who judges himself honestly will confess that there is scarcely an outward sin which he has committed that he might not have avoided, if he had been sufficiently watchful and prayerful ; and that even the corrupt desires of his heart and his worldliness of spirit might have been much restrained, if he had endeavoured to keep his heart with all diligence, and had prayed with becoming earnestness for the aid of restraining grace. Taking home to himself, then, the charge that he is the author of his own degradation as a sinner, he cannot but be ashamed to look up to the Holy One, and must acknowledge that he has no excuse to offer for the sins by which he has offended Him. And more especially will his sense of shame be deepened, when he takes into account the fact that in many instances his transgressions and shortcomings have caused the name of God to be evil spoken of, and have cast a stain upon the religion which he professes ; and that while he was thus wilfully dishonouring God, there was not only marvellous forbearance manifested toward him, but countless bounties of providence showered down upon him every day. It is such considerations as these, and particularly the thought of God's mercy revealed in Christ Jesus, which he has so ungratefully neglected and put away from him, that make the sinner lie prostrate with his hand upon his mouth, feeling that he is poor indeed.

3. In the third place, the poor in spirit referred to in the text are those who feel that they can make no satisfaction nor compensation for their sin. This point has indeed been passingly alluded to already, but its importance requires that it be brought prominently into view. When a man is reduced to great worldly straits, he may console himself with the thought that better days will dawn upon him, and that he will be able to retrieve his losses and bring his affairs to a prosperous issue. And, in like manner, when a man is hard pressed by the sense of sin, and awakened for a moment to a conviction of the danger which hangs over him, he may get present

deliverance from his trouble by forming the resolution to repent and seek after God in earnest at some future time ; and thus he imagines that what he is to do then will make reparation for the past. But it is not so when the Spirit of God is dealing with the conscience. Then sin, which is felt to be an insult to God's authority, cannot be so slightly disposed of. If it has done injury to a fellow-creature, that injury may possibly be repaired. But the law of God has been violated : its condemnation has been incurred ; and what human arm can thrust that condemnation aside ? ' I am a debtor to do the whole law of God. I have broken it. Any endeavours, on my part, to do better in time to come, will not themselves come up to the divine requirements, much less will they compensate for the evil which has been already wrought. So that I must lie altogether helpless, as it were, bound hand and foot, to suffer the infliction of the sentence.' Thus, then, you will perceive that when a sinner is brought to realize his guilt and worthlessness, he is not only self-abased, but also helplessly self-condemned. If he could make any satisfaction, he might lift up his head. But he cannot make satisfaction ; and so, by his self-condemnation, he just anticipates the righteous judgment which God will pronounce upon him.

4. Now, putting together what has been said of the ' poor in spirit,'—that they are those who labour under felt spiritual wants, who are conscious that their wants and troubles are for the most part self-caused, who feel that they can make no satisfaction nor compensation for their sin, and who thus lie before God self-abased and helplessly self-condemned,—we perceive that they are just the persons who are elsewhere referred to in the Scripture as ' of a broken spirit '—' of a broken and contrite heart,' as David expresses it ; or, as it is in Isaiah, ' of a contrite and humble spirit—of a poor and contrite spirit, that trembleth at God's word.' Or we may say that ' the poor in spirit ' are those whom the Saviour, in another place, designates as ' the weary and heavy laden.' Often in the psalms does the expression occur, ' I am poor and needy,' when the psalmist is not thinking of his temporal condition, but of his spiritual state as a guilty and worthless creature in the sight of God. Altogether, then, you will perceive that it is

those who feel the burden of sin, and their own defilement by it, and their utter inability to deliver themselves either from the pollution of it or from the punishment which it deserves, that are first addressed in the language of sympathy and encouragement by the Saviour. They would have been looked upon with haughty contempt by the self-righteous scribes, and thrust away as bringing contamination in their very touch. But there is a kindly eye upon them, and a kindly hand stretched out to raise them up. The Lord marks the secret troubles of the wounded spirit; He hears its self-accusings, and its acknowledgment of the justice of the sentence which condemns it; He notes its ardent aspiration for freedom from the bondage of corruption; and He then speaks the gracious words, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.'

II. I come then to speak for a little of this blessedness. The persons referred to feel as if they had lost, by their sin, all which is most desirable, and forfeited all title to regain it. But no. Christ says to them, The highest blessedness is now brought within your reach—yours is the kingdom of heaven. We must endeavour, then, to ascertain what is to be understood by this expression. It occurs very frequently, and sometimes with different shades of meaning attached to it; but it is seldom difficult to perceive the special signification of it in the passages where it is employed. The general meaning of it is, the new spiritual dispensation which was to be established by the Messiah. This was frequently described by the prophets under the name of a kingdom in which Messiah was to reign, and which was not to be confined to Judea, but to comprehend the whole world. It was in the character of a king, therefore, that the Jews expected the Messiah to appear; and accordingly, when John the Baptist began to preach, and to say, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand,' the people understood him as proclaiming the immediate advent of the Messiah. We give substantially the meaning of the expression, the kingdom of heaven, or of God, then, when we say that it signifies the gospel dispensation, or the Church of Christ with all its privileges. Now

much of our Lord's teaching, and many of His parables more especially, were designed to set forth the nature and peculiarities and destiny of this spiritual kingdom, the Church, and the character of those who are truly its subjects or members. It lies not in my way at present to advert to these topics. But this general remark requires to be made: that the condition of Christ's kingdom or Church on earth is one of progress toward the higher and perfect state which it will attain in heaven; and the privileges which the subjects or members of it enjoy on earth are the first-fruits and earnestings of that perfect blessedness which they will enjoy in heaven. We do not describe two different societies when we contrast the Church on earth with the Church in heaven, but the same society in two different conditions. So that, upon the whole, we are to consider the words of the text as signifying that the poor in spirit are invited to partake of all the blessings which Christ confers upon His people here, and all which He has laid up for them in heaven. They are poor, they feel themselves to be poor and needy, and all the riches of His spiritual kingdom are freely made over to them. This implies, then, that whatever is necessary to cleanse them from guilt is given to them: they have redemption through the blood of Christ, even the forgiveness of sins. Whatever is needed to qualify them for the service of God is given to them; for He hath said, 'A new heart will I give unto you, and a right spirit will I put within you; and ye shall walk in my statutes, and keep my judgments, and do them.' Whatever is needed to make them truly blessed is given to them; for Christ gives Himself to be their portion. Behold, then, poor sinners, who labour and are heavy laden, who are writing bitter things against yourselves, and saying, How can God look with favour upon a wretched creature like me?—behold the good things which God has provided for you, if you receive into your hearts Jesus Christ His Son. 'You are washed, you are justified, you are sanctified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit.' This is present blessing to you. And beyond there are the exhaustless treasures of the heavenly inheritance, even fulness of joy at God's right hand, and in His presence pleasures for evermore.

But I must now conclude ; and in doing so, I would leave with you this remark. You must not suppose that when 'the poor in spirit' have once embraced the Saviour's gracious call, and have received through Him and from Him mercy to pardon, and grace to help, they can no longer be described by the name of poor and needy. Every day they experience wants, which every day they must make known, that they may be supplied. The advanced Christian, indeed, is delivered from the fears and disquietudes by which those are beset who are but entering on the path of life. But the most advanced feel most deeply that without Christ and the Spirit's grace they can do nothing ; and one of the most beautiful characteristics of the holiest of the children of the kingdom is this, that they will always be found 'walking the most humbly with their God.' Amen.



## XXXVIII.

### THE PARABLE OF THE WISE AND FOOLISH BUILDERS.

‘Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock : and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house ; and it fell not : for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand : and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house ; and it fell : and great was the fall of it.’—MATT. VII. 24-27.

**W**E come now to the winding up of this heavenly discourse. And if, in examining with some minuteness the most striking and prominent points of it, we have had truths presented to us calculated to arrest our attention, to humble us, and to make us ponder again and again the question, whether we are really the followers of Christ, the subjects of that kingdom of which He is the Lord, certainly the concluding part is well fitted to deepen any serious impression that may have been made upon us by all which goes before. It is in the form of a parable that the Lord sums up His address to the multitude gathered around Him. They were not a regularly summoned audience of any particular class or character, but a promiscuous assemblage of all classes and professions : some very ignorant, and others perhaps well instructed in the knowledge of the law and the prophets ; some respectable for their position in society, and others who may have been of the lowest grade, and of questionable reputation. But you will observe that while throughout His discourse the Saviour speaks without any special reference to this diversity of moral and social condition among His hearers, leaving every one to make application to himself of the truth which was announced, He now becomes more pointed at the

conclusion, and divides the whole multitude into *two classes*, and into two only. We can conceive that as the words of divine wisdom fell from His lips, as His doctrine dropt as the rain, and His speech distilled as the dew, the hearts of those who heard Him were differently affected. None that were susceptible of any pure and generous emotion could listen to those beautiful utterances of blessing with which the discourse commences, without being moved and melted thereby. None whose consciences were not seared could hear the exposition of the law, and the denunciations against hypocrisy in its varied forms, without being deeply impressed. And the plain pathway which was opened up to the mercy-seat, together with the comprehensive directory for making their requests known to their heavenly Father, must have made many feel as if they had been introduced into a new world, and were brought nearer to heaven than they had ever been before. There would thus be among them some who listened with delight to the holy Teacher; others who felt self-condemned as He enforced His sacred lessons; others who could barely venture to contemplate the high standard of excellence which He laid before them; others who, while they could not but admit the truth and suitableness of what was said, were yet not prepared at the moment to yield themselves up to its influence; and no doubt, also, some who heard with dislike or wrath the condemnation of sinful practices in which they had been accustomed to live. More minutely still might that great multitude have been classified, as we may suppose that there would be present representatives of *all* orders, and of *all* opinions, that could be collected from a large district of country. But still, as I have said, the Lord recognises only two classes, leaving all to conclude of necessity that to the one class or the other each one of them must belong. And He places the matter in such a light that it is impossible to mistake His meaning. 'Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them,' is the distinctive characteristic of the one class; and 'every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not,' is the equally plain characteristic of the other class. And with this one leading distinction in view He frames the parable in the text.

Before proceeding to examine and illustrate this parable, I would offer one general observation. It is obvious that when He says, 'Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them,' He refers to the truths which He had just proclaimed in this discourse upon the Mount. He could not at the time require attention and obedience to any other doctrines and duties than those which He had propounded. He did not deem it suitable as yet to reveal what He was afterwards to make known concerning His own person, and the great work of atonement which He had come into the world to execute. And therefore He could not enjoin upon those who were hearing Him the acceptance of these all-important doctrines. But it does seem strange that some people should single out the sermon on the Mount from the rest of the Scripture, as if it stood by itself, and formed of itself a summary of Christian doctrine and practice; and should suppose that to receive it, and to endeavour to live in accordance with the precepts which are inculcated in it, is sufficient to constitute a man a disciple of Christ, and to give him good hope for eternity. That it is impossible to admire it too much, or to overrate the importance of it as a portion of the inspired Word, every one who believes the Bible will admit. But it does not comprehend the whole of Christ's teaching; it does not bring Him before us in the character in which we need to know Him, as the Good Shepherd who came to lay down His life for the sheep. It presents Him to us in His prophetic and kingly offices, as the Revealer of the divine will, and the Lord who has a right to demand our obedience; but it does not tell us what was afterwards so fully declared, that He is the great High Priest, who came to give His life a ransom for many, and to put away sin, and the curse which sin entails, by the sacrifice of Himself. We would therefore be liable to the charge of dealing deceitfully with the word of Christ if we were to restrict the application of the text to the instructions which He delivered at this particular time. What holds good of these precious sayings holds equally good of all which He afterwards taught, and of all which His apostles, inspired by His Spirit, taught in His name. So that truly, instead of what is written at the close of the Book of Revelation, 'I tes-

tify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book : and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book,'—instead of this solemn caution, we might with equal propriety affix to the whole volume of inspired truth, which may be emphatically called *the Word of Christ*, these sentences with which He concludes His sermon on the Mount : ' Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock ; and every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand.'

With these remarks, I now come to consider more particularly this instructive parable of the Two Builders, and to make application of it to the professed disciples of Christ. The general bearing of it is very easily apprehended. But to those to whom it was spoken it must have come home with greater force than it can do to us. The houses of the common people in that country were built of materials which were very frail and easily destroyed, and were especially liable to be swept away by any violent hurricane or flood. The wealthy, however, who had many valuables to preserve, and who could afford the expense, were careful to erect their houses of more substantial materials, and upon a foundation which could resist the flood. Sudden and desolating storms of wind and rain were, and still are, not uncommon in those lands. Modern travellers tell us of the destruction which they work upon the habitations of the poorer classes, which have been reared without any precaution against such contingencies ; and there can be no doubt that the similitude which our Lord employs in the text was one which had been verified in the experience of most of those who heard Him. Still, although we may not have so vivid a conception of the meaning of the parable as they had, we can clearly perceive its appropriateness and significance.

The two builders, then, represent the whole of those who call themselves the followers of Christ. They form two classes ;

but all of them profess to be making preparation for eternity. All of them cherish the hope, more or less vague or distinct, that they shall be received into heaven at last; and their hope and their preparation are likened in the text to a building which they are engaged in erecting, and which is to form a refuge or defence to them while they wait for the heavenly inheritance. Now you will notice, first, that there are certain points of resemblance between the two classes as they are here described; secondly, that there are most important points of difference between them; and, thirdly, that the issue of their respective methods of procedure is as different as possible. The examination of these three topics will serve to illustrate the parable, and afford ample room for application.

I. In the first place, there are certain points of resemblance between the two classes into which the professed followers of Christ must *all* be divided, and who are here likened to two builders, who are engaged in rearing a structure which will make them safe for eternity. These points of resemblance are suggested by the words of our Lord, that both of these hear His sayings, and in connection with this, *proceed to build*. So far, then, externally you cannot draw any distinction between them. There are three particulars contained under this general head of resemblance which require to be noticed.

1. In the first place, there is implied an evident recognition by both parties of the authority of Christ's word as His. 'These sayings of mine' is the expression He uses in both cases, manifestly giving us to understand that it is the word which comes from Him—and which is received, because it comes from Him—that all who call themselves His disciples must take and rest upon as the law for their guidance. Tradition had a large place in the teaching of the scribes when He came forth as the great Teacher. Tradition, together with what is called the opinion of those fathers of the Christian Church who came immediately after the apostles, is counted of authority in the Church of Rome, and by too many in some other Churches. But it may be said that, among all who really have any title to the name of Christians, the Bible, the Word of Christ,—the infallible Word, because the men who wrote it spake as they were moved

by the Spirit of Christ,—this Word is the accepted standard both of faith and of duty. A man who rejects the Scripture as containing the only authoritative declaration of the will of Christ, rejects Christ Himself. And a man who puts anything else in competition with the Scripture as a foundation for his faith and practice, follows a divisive course, and is subject to another master than Christ.

But although these points might be enlarged upon, I do not enter into any discussion respecting them at present. I speak only with reference to yourselves, as holding the well-known principle,—from which our reformers, who freed us from the yoke of Popery, proceeded as their starting-point, or rather, I should say, which they laid down as the foundation of all their procedure,—that the Scriptures, which contain the teaching of Christ, the great Prophet of the Church, are the only rule of faith and practice. If this principle is not held, then you are not the followers of Christ, but the followers of men; then your faith does not rest upon the word of Christ, but upon the word of men. And it does not enter within the scope of this discourse to make any reference to your destiny. But I take it for granted that it is Christ's word that you receive as binding upon you, and that you profess your subjection to its authority as your directory in this world, and look to its exceeding great and precious promises as the ground of your hope for the world to come. In this respect, then, all of us are at one.

2. Then, secondly, there is this other point of resemblance between the true and the mere nominal disciples of Christ, *that they hear His sayings*. They all read the Scriptures as the Word of God; they all observe the ordinances which Christ has appointed; they all wait upon the preaching of the Word; and they all reverence the services of the sanctuary. This statement will not be regarded as giving too wide an interpretation of the language of the text, 'Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine.' The preaching of the Word is Christ's ordinance for the conversion of sinners, and the building up of the converted in their holy faith; and the waiting upon this, and reverencing all the institutions which Christ has set up in His Church, is practically what is to be understood by the hearing of His sayings. Now with respect to this point,

there may be no room for making any outward distinction between those who worship in spirit and in truth and those whose worship is mere formalism. The formalist may be as well instructed in the doctrines of the Bible, and as well able to speak of the duties which it inculcates, as the man whose whole heart is in the matter. But where there is neglect of ordinances, and open contempt of the Word, there can be no Christian discipleship. And the destiny of those who act thus is not revealed in the text, but in such other passages as these : ‘ Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish ;’ and, ‘ Because I have called, and ye refused ; I have stretched out my hand, and no man regarded ; but ye have set at nought all my counsel, and would none of my reproof : I also will laugh at your calamity ; I will mock when your fear cometh.’ Confining our view exclusively to the persons referred to by the Saviour in the words before us, we have only to look at those who *externally* do show respect for His Word and ordinances.

3. In the third place, there is this other ‘point of resemblance between the true and the merely nominal disciples of Jesus, that both are represented as proceeding *to build*—to raise up a structure in which they may be safe for eternity, according to the teaching of His Word. We can scarcely think that there *is even one* individual who really makes a profession of faith in Christ who has not his thoughts sometimes directed toward the future state, and who does not suppose but that his belief and his conduct have a connection with his future destiny. But unquestionably there are *many* who are seriously exercised about this matter, and who imagine that they are rightly employed about it, while they are labouring under grievous delusion. We all know that there are many thoughtless people, both young and old, who are contented with the form of religion, and think that they will be made partakers of the heavenly inheritance, because they outwardly honour Christ, and are members of His Church, and in their life are as careful and consistent as the greater part of Christians seem to be. But there are others who appear to take a much deeper interest in everything connected with religion, and who labour most diligently to promote what they believe to be the real good of their fellow-creatures, who at

the same time are not under the influence of the love of Christ, and whose will is not brought into subjection to the will of Christ. These in outward respects bear a very close resemblance to the true disciples. And it might be well reckoned presumption in any man to say to this or that one individually, Your religion is unsound, and your hopes are fallacious. But it cannot be wrong to say, Make sure of the ground on which you stand; do not mistake profession for reality; do not think that you are right, because if you are *not*, many others must be grievously wrong; but apply to yourselves faithfully the tests by which Christ's true disciples are to be known, lest you discover, when the evil cannot be remedied, that He will disown you, as being none of His. In these respects, then, the two classes of builders resemble each other: that they seem to be working with the same materials, viz. those which are furnished by the Word of Christ; and that they have, apparently, the same end in view, viz. to have a refuge for eternity.

II. Now I come, in the second place, to speak of the important points of difference there are between them. These are set forth in the parable in the words, 'Whosoever doeth my sayings, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock;' 'and every one that heareth my sayings, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand.' In the parallel passage in Luke's Gospel, the sentiment in the first clause is yet more significantly expressed: 'He that heareth my sayings, and doeth them, is like a man which built an house, and *digged deep*, and laid the foundation upon a rock.' Now here also there are three things which call for our attention. There is, first, a radical difference in the character of the two builders—the one is *wise*, and the other is *foolish*; secondly, there is a difference between their modes of procedure—the one *digs deep*, the other is content with surface work; and thirdly, there is a vast difference between the foundations they choose—the one builds on a rock, the other on the sand. The second and third particulars I would regard as comprehending practically what is to be understood by *doing Christ's sayings*. Let me offer a few remarks upon these several points.



1. In the first place, there is a radical difference in the character of these two builders: the one is *wise*, and the other is *foolish*. Now what I have particularly to notice here is, that this is not a mere *natural* difference. The statement here is not to the effect that as some men are gifted with intelligence and sagacity above others, they will thus be led to choose the path which conducts to life eternal, while the others suffer themselves to be drawn away by those flitting lights that shine only to entice the unwary traveller to destruction. For, however much men may be distinguished from one another by natural gifts, and however massive the intellect and varied the acquirements of some may be as contrasted with others, it is true of *all*, that if left to the mere guidance of their own minds, they would never seek the way of life, nor choose God as their portion. Divine teaching is necessary to impart that wisdom which enables men truly to distinguish between good and evil, and to make choice of the good part which cannot be taken away from them. And hence the real disciples of Christ are said to have 'the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him,' and to be '*made wise* unto salvation through faith that is in Christ Jesus.' The wise builder, then, is the man who has been taught by the Spirit of God, and has the Spirit of God dwelling in him; the foolish is the *natural* man, who, trusting to his own understanding, and supposing that he can direct his own steps, follows his own fancy in interpreting the Word of God, and therefore destroys his own soul. And it is of the utmost consequence that this point be kept in view. We only make a right beginning in matters pertaining to salvation, when, conscious of our own ignorance, and distrusting ourselves, we seek in earnest, and with importunity, the promised Spirit to guide us into all truth. We then get the right plan for the erection of our spiritual edifice, and perceive all the steps which are necessary to enable us to prosecute the work successfully.

2. In the second place, there is a difference in the mode of procedure of the two builders: the one digs deep, while the other is content with surface work. This point, you will perceive, is taken from what is stated in Luke's Gospel, and

not from the passage before us. But it is a point of great importance. It implies that there is an intense earnestness, a putting forth of all the energies of the mind, and a throwing of the whole heart into the work of seeking salvation and following out the requirements of God's Word. In one respect it may be said, indeed, that the work of seeking salvation is easy, and that it calls for no very painful effort. The language of the Scripture is, 'Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved;' and what is the difficulty in believing? it may be asked. Now I would say, in answer to this, that while there is no difficulty in uttering the words, 'I believe in the Lord Jesus Christ,' it is one thing to utter them, and another thing to put the heart into them. Many a man has had to struggle for years, deeply concerned about the salvation of his soul, before he has been able to say with his whole heart, 'I believe,' and thus to obtain peace. There are all the obstructions of self-righteousness to be dug through; there are all the reluctances to renounce the service of the world and sin to be overcome; in a word, there is the complete renouncing of self connected with believing in Christ;—and to be able to get through all this mass of opposing influences, and with all sincerity to say, 'I count all things but loss for the excellent knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord,' requires an effort, or rather a series of efforts, which the Spirit of God alone can strengthen a man to make. Do not suppose, however, that these exercises of self-renunciation and casting off the fetters of worldliness are parts of faith, and that a man must engage in them, and perform them as a separate work, before he can venture to think of embracing Christ. For this is not the light in which the subject is to be viewed. But to believe in Christ with the heart involves the renouncing of self, and of everything which Christ condemns; and *that self* is an obstacle between the soul and Christ which, as I have said, it requires the special grace of the Spirit to enable a man to thrust out of his way. And hence Calvin says, very strikingly, in connection with this subject which I am handling, 'That all who do not dig down to a complete renouncement of self, do but dig upon sand.' And *to do* Christ's sayings, as contrasted with the *mere hearing*

of them, is just in part to renounce self, and embrace Christ, and take up the cross and follow Him.

But there is, as many suppose, a much easier method of salvation than this. To admit the fact that Christ is the Saviour, and to discharge with tolerable propriety the ordinary duties of religion and the common duties of life, is all that is necessary, in their view, to constitute a Christian. Every man has his sins and frailties; but God is merciful, and Christ will make up all deficiencies. This is the prevailing religion of the world. But it is what I would designate *miserable surface work*. There is no earnestness here; there is no *striving* to enter in at the strait gate; there is no struggling as for one's life. The advocates of this religion, indeed, actually raise an outcry against all zeal and earnestness, and denounce as hot-headed enthusiasts those who seek to arouse sinners from their deadly lethargy and urge them to flee from the wrath to come. But we shall see by and by on which side truth and wisdom are to be found.

3. In the third place, there is a vast difference between the *foundations* which the two builders choose: the one builds upon a rock, the other upon the sand. The rock meant in the parable, according to some, is the *Word of Christ*. But I follow the opinion of those who understand by it *Christ Himself*. 'Other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.' He is the elect and precious corner stone, on which the faith and hope of His people rest. 'They drank from that spiritual rock which followed them, and that rock was Christ.' We cannot, indeed, rightly make a separation between the Word of Christ and Christ Himself, so far as salvation is concerned, because if we do not believe the Word which reveals Christ, and presents Him to us, we cannot believe in Christ Himself. The two things are indissolubly connected—the testimony concerning the Saviour, and the Saviour Himself as the great subject of that testimony. But yet there is a distinction between the two things worthy of notice. It may be put in this form: 'I cannot reject the testimony of Scripture respecting Christ as the only Saviour of sinners, without rejecting Christ Himself. But then, I may not question the truth of the testimony, while yet I do

not receive and rest upon Christ.' This distinction is not of little consequence. I read in the Scripture that God hath set forth Christ to be a propitiation for sin, through faith in His atoning sacrifice. Then to Christ, thus set forth before me, I must look as the propitiation for my sin; and to Christ I must commit the burden of my guilt, and from Him seek deliverance. It is a personal transaction between me and the Saviour. He offers Himself to me, and I take Him with all the benefits which He bestows, and with all the requirements which He makes. But if I look merely at the word of testimony, and say to myself, There *is* a Saviour, and life is to be obtained through faith in Him,—and if my mere knowledge of this truth, and acquiescence in it, form all which I consider needful for salvation,—then do you not see that although, in a general way, I may be said to believe in God's appointed way of salvation, yet I do not really lay hold of that salvation for myself? In this case I might be represented as having been led *to see* the foundation on which I should build, without having taken one step to commence the building. But this would not be 'to do the sayings of Christ.' His Word declares that unless we look to Himself, place confidence in Himself, take Him to our hearts, and give ourselves to Him, so that He is ours and we are His, we cannot have the blessings which He bestows. So that it is only when we have sincerely made choice of Christ as our Saviour, and have been united to Him by believing in Him, that we have reached the foundation on which we can erect the structure of our hopes for eternity. Faith is the cement which unites us to Him who is the foundation, or the chief corner stone; and it is in this union that our safety lies. But although to seek to be united to Christ, and to refuse to be satisfied with anything less than this, should be our first and great concern, it is really only the commencement of the work which as Christians we have to perform. The foundation is chosen in order that we may build upon it. And what is the building? Nothing else than the advancement which we make in the cultivation of the graces of the Spirit, in holy living and acting, whereby our union to Christ is manifested. To change the figure, united to Christ as His members, we grow up in

all things unto Him who is the Head, so that we are known to be His by our resembling Him. And then only can we be said to hear His sayings, and do them, when we thus commit to Him the keeping of our souls, and all our interests for time and eternity, and take Him as the great pattern to which we seek to be conformed. And then truly we have our foundation laid upon the rock, and are infallibly secure; for Jesus Christ is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.

But, alas, there are many who reject this foundation and build upon the sand. They do not utterly reject the doctrine that Christ is the Saviour of sinners, but they so pervert it, or explain it away, or mix it up with fancies of their own, as practically to set it aside. By the death of Christ they suppose that salvation is brought within the reach of all men, so that if we only endeavour sincerely to obey God's law, we shall certainly find acceptance with Him. Thus in reality they build their hope of acceptance, not upon Christ, but upon their own works, upon the general correctness of their life, and their deeds of benevolence put together. They dwell much also on the love and mercy of God, and think that He will not condemn any but the atrociously wicked. They lay great weight likewise upon repentance, as if a few words of acknowledgment of sin, and an expression of sorrow on account of it, could wash away the transgressions of a lifetime and satisfy the demands of justice. And when there is attention to the forms of religion, to prayer, and the reading of God's Word, together with a certain amount of almsgiving, a man's hope of salvation is thought to rest upon an immovable basis. In this way, with a general admission of the fact that Christ is the Saviour, but without taking Him to be their Saviour, and without giving themselves up to Him,—neither trusting to Him, nor loving Him, nor following Him, but confiding in their own righteousness, and with certain vague notions about the mercy of God and the efficacy of repentance,—they imagine that all is right and safe for eternity.

Thus, then, the two builders prosecute their work. *The one*, taught and renewed by the Spirit of God, sets himself resolutely to contend against all the influences which would come

between him and Christ. On Christ alone he rests for pardon, and life, and grace, and everything; and to grow in the likeness of Christ is the grand object of his desire. The other, feeling no need of the Spirit's help, thinks he can commend himself to the favour of God by good works and a few acts of piety; and when he is reminded of sins and shortcomings, the mercy of God and repentance form the refuge to which he flees. The foundation of the wise builder is Christ, the Rock of Ages; the foundation of the foolish builder is a few vain imaginations that have no more stability than the shifting sand.

III. I now come, in the third place, to speak briefly of the issue of these two methods of procedure, which is as different as possible. This is brought out in the words, The wise man built his house upon a rock: 'and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock.' But the foolish man built his house upon the sand: 'and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.' Some have entered minutely into the examination of these words, and have interpreted each particular expression as denoting a particular species of opposition that has to be encountered. But this is unnecessary. The language just gives us a graphic description of an eastern hurricane, such as we sometimes read of; and we are warranted to apply it to all the various kinds of trial and trouble and hostility which the followers of Christ have to endure from the *world* and *Satan*, and from every source. These things bring the reality of a man's faith and hope to the test.

It is an easy matter to move onward thinking that all is safe, while there is little to disturb us either from within or from without. While we have moderate health and strength, and are in the enjoyment of our peaceful Sabbaths, and have to suffer no persecution or distress on account of our religious profession, then there is little to distinguish the nominal Christian from the genuine disciple of the Lord. In a calm day, with a smooth sea and a fair wind, the frail and ill-conditioned bark glides along as well as the strong and well-

appointed ship. It is the hurricane that reveals the difference; and the one founders, while the other rides out the storm in safety. And so in spiritual things, it is the day of darkness and of hard trial that shows us who are wise and who are foolish. The temptations of Satan are sometimes strongly directed against the people of God, and sometimes they have the effect of disquieting them very sorely. But this is to be noticed of these temptations, that while their effect may be for a season to make the believer feel as if he had never truly chosen Christ as his foundation, they never make him question the truth that Christ is the only sure and trustworthy foundation. And so, when by faith he gets the victory over the wicked one, he returns to rest upon the rock of his salvation with more assured confidence than ever. And in like manner, although the troubles and afflictions of life may bear very severely on him, although in person, in property, or by sad bereavements, he may be a heavy sufferer, and may sometimes be ready to say with Jacob, 'All these things are against me,' yet it is but for a brief space that his heart fails him. He feels that he has Christ, and that makes up every loss. Yea, and when the last fierce conflict comes, and Satan puts forth all his strength against him, the foundation of the believer standeth sure. None can separate him from the love of Christ. He can triumph amid the storm. His feet stand upon the rock, and the raging billows cannot move him, because they cannot shake the rock. He is safe, because he is united to Christ, against whom earth and hell combine their force in vain.

But how does the hope which has been built upon the sand stand out when storms break forth? Sometimes in this world, most marvellously, Satan cares not to disturb it, because it serves his purpose. The world does not quarrel with it, because it leads to no course of action that is much opposed to the world's ways. It is indeed a hope which has very little comfort to impart in the day of affliction. It is a hope which rather drives off pressing disquietude than gives any real and positive enjoyment. But still it often lasts till death come, and is not seen or felt to be fallacious in the present world. It is only beyond the grave that its utter emptiness is discovered. Then what will self-righteousness

avail, when it is tried by God's holy law? What will an appeal to God's mercy avail, when Christ was rejected, through whom alone the mercy is bestowed? What will the plea of repentance avail, when the sin professedly repented of was never forsaken, and no application was made to the precious blood which alone can cleanse the guilt of it away? Ah, brethren, that soul is lost irrecoverably which has not built its hope on Christ, and has not taken Him as its portion. The building falls, '*and great is the fall of it;*' for who can tell, who can conceive, the misery of a soul for ever lost? Oh, if you would escape this doom, make Christ the foundation of your hope, live under the influence of His love, and strive to be found acting for the advancement of His glory.

I have now brought this course of lectures to a close, in a series of thirty-nine discourses, and it is with reluctance that I leave the subject.<sup>1</sup> The oftener you look into it, the more meaning and beauty you will see in it. And it is not wonderful that the people who heard it were astonished, both at the doctrines which the Saviour taught, and the divine authority with which He uttered them. Most of them, however, as we have reason to believe, went away and soon forgot the instructions of the heavenly Teacher. But they could not free themselves from the responsibility which they were brought under by hearing them. Let *us* remember this; and let us remember also, that we lie under yet deeper responsibility; for we have *all* the sayings of Christ before us in the Word,—all which He has counted it needful to reveal for our salvation. And if it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for the people of Capernaum and others who heard this heavenly discourse, it will be more tolerable for Capernaum than for us if we fail to improve our higher privileges. Oh, let us seek to be found among the wise builders, who hear Christ's sayings, and do them,—who build their hopes upon *Him* as the Lord of life, the Lord their righteousness,—and then, after all the storms and troubles of this present time, we shall be received into the city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. Amen.

<sup>1</sup> This is the last of the lectures on Christ's Sermon on the Mount.



## XXXIX.

### CHRIST'S WORK FOR SINNERS, AND ITS FRUITS.

‘Therefore will I divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong ; because He hath poured out His soul unto death : and He was numbered with the transgressors ; and He bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.’—ISA. LIII. 12.

WHEN Philip the evangelist was led by the Spirit to meet with the Ethiopian eunuch, he found him reading the Book of Isaiah, and that very portion of it which is contained in the chapter from which the text is taken. The eunuch read, but he did not understand the meaning of what he read. Philip asked him, ‘Understandest thou what thou readest ? and he said unto him, How can I, except some man should guide me ?’ Then Philip, at his request, ‘went up into the chariot with him, and beginning at the same scripture, preached unto him Jesus.’ It could not have been better ordered than that the inquirer should have been reading this chapter, and that he should have found such an interpreter. And *we* derive benefit from the incident, because we get from it the sanction of the Spirit to interpret the whole passage as a prediction respecting Christ and His work, and the consequences of that work. I do not intend to enter upon an exposition of the chapter. But when you read it attentively, you will perceive that, as referring to Christ, it presents Him to us as invested with two high offices—the offices of a Priest and of a King. A minute examination might discover in it also a reference to the prophetic office, as when it is said, in ver. 11, ‘By His knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many.’ But certainly the two prominent topics in the chapter are—Christ the Priest, and the King, of the Church. And the same connection is noted between these two offices in other parts of Scripture. As when Zechariah says of the

Redeemer, that 'He shall sit as a Priest upon His throne;' when He Himself says that 'Christ had first to suffer, and then to enter into His glory;' and when the Apostle Peter says, that the witness borne by the Spirit to Christ in the Scripture, was to 'His sufferings and the glory that should follow.' The prophetic office is not lost sight of, neither is the importance of it undervalued, in the Bible. On the contrary, it is very frequently and largely referred to. But if I may venture to say so, it is not mentioned so often as might have been expected in immediate connection with the other two; while the priestly and kingly offices are very frequently conjoined, as having a most intimate relation to each other: for this reason, perhaps, that Christ, as the Prophet of the Church, revealed the will of God to us through the instrumentality of others for the most part, and could do so as effectually as by His personal teaching; whereas in the character of Priest and King He must act personally. The prophets and apostles as taught by Him could make known to the Church the truth which He saw fit to communicate. But He Himself only could obey and suffer and die for the salvation of guilty men; and He Himself only could earn the reward of this by being raised to the mediatorial throne, and made Head over all things to the Church, which is His body. Thus the priestly and kingly offices of the Redeemer come to be naturally and most closely associated together. So they are in this chapter throughout, as has been already said, and *very obviously* in the text. 'Therefore will I divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong; because He hath poured out His soul unto death: and He was numbered with the transgressors; and He bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.' These words embody, in brief terms, the substance of the covenant of redemption. They show us, partly at least, what Christ undertook to do, and what He did as the Covenant Head of His people; and they show us also the result of His work, as affecting both *Himself* and *them*. They are in exact harmony with these words of the apostle: 'Because He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross, therefore God hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name

which is above every name : that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, and every tongue confess that He is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.' This statement by the apostle may indeed be regarded as a commentary upon the words of the prophet in the text, or at least an illustration of them. Christ is represented to us in the text as having gone forth upon a great enterprise, which could only be accomplished at the expense of deep humiliation and suffering to Himself; and then as coming back from it a conqueror over all His enemies, and bringing the fruits of victory along with Him. As the Son of the Great King sent forth, with His own consent, to subdue a rebel province, to establish the authority of the laws, to offer pardon to the rebels on terms which should not compromise the rightful claims of justice, and with unlimited power to forgive or to punish, He came into this world. And when He had achieved all *that* which He had undertaken, He returned to the Father, 'leading captivity captive, and procuring gifts for men, even the rebellious.' The two principal topics in the text, then, on which we have at present to meditate, are—the work which Christ accomplished for the salvation of lost sinners, and the fruits of it, or the reward with which it was crowned. In thus presenting the subject I invert the order of the statement in the text, and follow rather *the sense* of the passage. There is, according to the obvious meaning of the words, in the first place, what the *Redeemer did*: 'He poured out His soul unto death: and was numbered with the transgressors; and bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors;' and then, in the second place, His reward: because of all this, the Father promises to divide Him a portion with the great, and to confer on Him the honour of dividing the spoil with the strong. If it were not that everything pertaining to Christ and His work is interesting to His people, these, which may be called elementary truths, might have been regarded as unsuitable for the present occasion. But it is good *always* to be with Christ. And although we have to contemplate Him again and again in His mediatorial work and offices, there is always a freshness in the subject to the heart of the believer.

I. In the first place, then, let me direct your attention to what the Redeemer undertook to do, and to what He did in the covenant of redemption, as the words of the prophet bring it before us. In this respect, He is to be viewed as *our Great High Priest*, performing the two functions of the priestly office, viz. in offering sacrifice for sin, and making intercession. The three particulars first mentioned are connected with the *sacrificial work*: 'He poured out His soul unto death: and was numbered with the transgressors; and bare the sin of many;' and then the *intercessory* work is mentioned by itself. I shall just consider these points in the order in which the prophet states them.

1. In the first place, Christ as our Priest 'poured out His soul unto death.' The expression is remarkable, and demands our particular attention. We have somewhat similar forms of speech used in the New Testament with respect to the death of Christ, which, it requires to be specially *remarked*, are employed to describe *His death*, and that of no other. Thus in the Gospel of Matthew (xxvii. 50): 'Jesus, when He had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost'—literally, 'dismissed His spirit.' So in Luke (xxiii. 46): 'When Jesus had cried with a loud voice, He said, Father, into Thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, He gave up the ghost'—*i.e.* 'breathed out His spirit.' And again in John (xix. 30): 'When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, He said, It is finished: and He bowed His head, and gave up the ghost'—literally, 'delivered up His spirit.' I may notice that you will find in your Bible oftener than once the expression used with reference to death, as 'a giving or yielding up of the ghost.' Thus, 'Jacob, when he had made an end of commanding his sons, gathered up his feet into the bed, and yielded up the ghost.' But the term so rendered is different in the original scriptures from that which is applied to the death of Christ, and very different from that which Isaiah employs in the text: 'He poured out His soul unto death.' Now there is obviously some special design to be answered by the peculiarity of this expression—a design to draw our attention to the death of Christ, as not only of most momentous import

from the effects which were to be produced by it, but also as *in itself*, in the *very manner* of it, distinguishable from the death of any merely mortal man. *One thing* is plain, and is frequently referred to, that it was *a voluntary act* on His part to give Himself up to die. For this end He came into the world and assumed our nature. And the act as voluntary, or of His own free will, and without constraint, was altogether different from that submission to the cruel sentences of tyrants and persecutors which was exhibited by the countless martyrs who suffered death for His name's sake. When *they* were in the hands of their enemies, there was no alternative for them but either to deny Christ or to die. And willingly they died, yea, joyfully, because death was the door of their admission to the marriage supper of the Lamb. They refused to accept deliverance on the terms on which it was offered to them, that they might obtain a better resurrection. But the case did not stand so with the Saviour. His life was not at the disposal of His enemies, neither was it wrested from Him by any power which He could not have easily mastered. For when His disciples were attempting to defend Him in the garden, He forbade them, saying, 'Think you that I cannot now pray to my Father, and He shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?' Then further, this also is plain, that His death was not caused by the mere process of crucifixion and the wearing out of the bodily and mental powers of His true human nature. The Apostle Peter, indeed, on the day of Pentecost, when he was charging home upon the Jews the guilt of treating the Messiah as they had done, said to them, 'Ye took Him, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain Him.' And this could not be denied. Yea, unquestionably, when we look to the Redeemer merely as a man, we may say that when He was nailed to the cross, at the instigation of the chief priests and rulers, He was *put to death* by them; and that death, in His case, as in all similar cases, would have been the natural result of the crucifixion. But I think, when you look at the text, and at the writings of the evangelists, you will mark a striking peculiarity in the death of Christ. It was not with the lassitude

and exhausted energy which intense suffering brings with it, making death like a sinking into sleep, that He passed away. He said, 'It is finished,' and *then* 'delivered up His spirit.' 'He cried with a loud voice,' so as even to attract the notice of the Roman centurion, and *then* 'He breathed out His spirit.'

Now these passages must be interpreted by the words which He Himself spoke a short time before. 'Therefore doth my Father love me, because I lay down my life, that I might take it again. *No man taketh it from me*, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again.' And in another place, 'I am the Good Shepherd: the Good Shepherd giveth His life for the sheep.' He does not merely put His life in hazard for the safety of the flock, but He *gives it* up that they may be safe and secure.

And now, to bring these remarks to a point, we have to look to Christ as in Himself both *the lamb* slain from the foundation of the world, and also *the priest* who made the offering.

The priest *always offered* the sacrifice. Christ was a priest; and He offered the sacrifice of *Himself*. To suppose that the Jewish people, or the Roman soldiers, took away His life from Him, would be, in this the greatest of all sacrifices, yea, the consummation of all sacrifices, to suppose that *they* were the priests, and that *He* was merely the victim. But this is not the doctrine of the Scripture. For you read, that 'not by the blood of goats and calves, but by *His own blood* He entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us;' and 'through the eternal Spirit He *offered Himself* without spot unto God.' That His enemies resolved to put Him to death, and did all that human power could compass to accomplish it, we know. But if He had not, by His own voluntary act, 'poured out His soul unto death,' apart from the doings of His enemies, He would not have been the *High Priest* of our profession; He would have been by *name* only a priest, without offering a sacrifice.

And let it be observed, in thus sacrificing Himself, giving away His life, by His own voluntary act, He did what no mere man ever was authorized, or ever can think himself authorized, to do. Because no mere man can say, 'No man

taketh my life from me ; I have power over my life, to lay it down, and to take it up again.'

I might have spoken at much greater length on this subject—Christ's sacrifice of Himself—but the time forbids. It is too commonly overlooked, however, to the undervaluing, it is to be feared, of the great doctrine of the atonement. It is by Christ's *giving Himself* a ransom for many that salvation comes to the lost children of men. 'He loved me, and gave Himself for me,' the apostle says.

But it was not as Priest making satisfaction by sacrifice that Christ gave Himself for me, if He was merely a victim, although indeed a willing victim, in the hand of His cruel enemies. The Roman soldiers were the priests, and they made Jesus the Saviour, if, by their fastening Him to the cross, they took away His life. But I look to something higher in this great transaction. In the giving up of His life was bound up the gift of life to all His redeemed ones. It was no fierce and unrighteous onset of the wicked against the Holy One of God that made Christ my Saviour, and constituted Him the High Priest of the Church. It was the Blessed One Himself who became my Saviour, when, upon the cross, all being finished that was written of Him, 'He poured out His soul unto death.' If it had been necessary for Him to wait, like those who were crucified along with Him, until exhausted nature, with further cruelty, terminated His suffering, then it might have been said merely that *He* was put to death. But it was not so. He *gave* His life freely, willingly, *by a mighty effort*, to pay the price which was requisite for the ransom of His people's life. He was at once the Priest and the sacrifice.

2. But I must now pass on to consider the second point referred to in the text, that Christ, as our Priest, 'was numbered with the transgressors.' *The most obvious* interpretation of these words is that which is given in the Gospel of Mark (xv. 27, 28): 'And with Him they crucify two thieves ; the one on His right hand, and the other on His left. And the scripture was fulfilled, which saith, And He was numbered with the transgressors.'

We see at once, in this application, the *literal* fulfilment of the prophet's words. The Messiah,—the long-looked for, the

hope of Israel, the desire of all nations,—when He appeared, was treated as an outcast, and was adjudged to death as the most heinous of transgressors.

But the words of the prophets, while they refer to things external, and are verified by the movements of providence in the world, have very often a deeper meaning under the surface than that which presents itself to a careless reader. And so it is here. 'He was numbered with the transgressors.' This was according to the estimate of men. They made no distinction between the two malefactors and Him who was crucified in the midst. But in quite another sense, and that with a more special bearing upon His priestly work, the Lord Jesus 'was numbered with transgressors.' The Scripture brings that point into our view very strikingly, when it says, that the Father 'made Him, who knew no sin, to be sin for us.'

There would have been no death in the family of Adam, but for sin. That a perfectly holy being should suffer and die, is repugnant to all our ideas of the divine rectitude. And in some way or other, therefore, Christ must have had connection with sin, else He could not have suffered, and been subjected to death. *Personally*, He was absolutely sinless. 'Holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners' was He. But when the sin-offering, under the law, was brought to the altar, and put into the hand of the priest, and when the offerer laid his hand upon its head and confessed his sin over it, there was a transference of guilt from him to the victim; and the creature that was incapable of sin was substituted in the place of the actual transgressor, and had to endure the penalty for him, which is death. In this way, then, the Redeemer was numbered with transgressors, not merely because He was crucified with two who had been condemned as criminals, but also, and more especially, because, as the substitute of sinners, He was dealt with as a sinner, and had to suffer the penalty due to sin by the divine law. No stroke of vengeance could have fallen on Him, no pang could have ruffled His holy soul, no cross could have been erected for Him, if He had not *put Himself* in the sinner's stead. But thus He became the lamb for the sacrifice, and as Himself the Priest, He offered it.

And here, my friends, let me remind you that I am not



treating of a mere doctrinal question when I ask you to look at Christ as *numbered with transgressors*. There is a relation between Him and His redeemed people—between Him and you, *if ye* are among them. As I have already said, when a victim was brought for sacrifice, the offerer put his hand on its head and confessed his sin. Then the victim stood in his place; the guilt was transferred to it, and it was slain. Even so, if Christ is the Lamb of God, the atoning sacrifice *for you*, you have, by the act of faith receiving Him, cast the burden of your sins on Him; and thus *your very* sins formed part of that *imputed* weight of transgression which made Him be numbered among transgressors, and dealt with as a transgressor, even to the enduring of the law's extremest penalty. And are you now in the enjoyment of peace with God, and of a blessed hope which sustains your soul amid all the ills of life? It is just because this transference of guilt from you to Him, which you have been enabled by faith to make, caused the Holy One of God to become sin for you, that you might be made the righteousness of God in Him. A blessed state for you! But oh, does it not reveal, in fearful colours, the malignity of sin when, in presenting Himself to make atonement for it, He must condescend to be numbered with the transgressors, and to endure such travail of soul as language cannot depict, nor imagination conceive?

3. But in these remarks I somewhat anticipate the third point which was to be considered: 'He bare the sin of many.' The Apostle Peter gives us the commentary on this passage, when he says, that 'the Lord Jesus Himself bare our sins in His own body on the tree.' In some parts of Scripture the sufferings and death of Christ are called the *cup* which He had to drink; as when He Himself says, 'The cup which my Father hath given me to drink, shall I not drink it?' He drank the cup of bitterness which our sin caused to be prepared for Him; He drank it to the dregs, that we might drink the sweet cup of pardon and peace and blessedness. But in the text, as more in keeping with His office and work as our High Priest, He is represented *as bearing* the sin of many; the burden of it being laid on Him in the way of suffering for it.

Now there are three respects in which the Redeemer may be said to have borne the sin of many. He did so, first, by enduring the punishment which was due to their sin ; secondly, by removing it out of sight, so that it is not reckoned against them ; and, thirdly, by taking it *away from them*—delivering them from the pollution and power of it, and creating in them a clean heart and a right spirit.

I do not mean to enlarge upon these several points, although they are all of importance. But a remark or two may be offered.

1st. Christ bore the sin of many in this sense, that He endured the punishment which was due to their sin. There is a tendency at the present day to overlook, or rather to explain away, this great doctrine. The death of Christ is held up to admiration as the brightest example the world ever saw of heroic endurance, of meekness, of patience, and of love. But as a sacrifice for sin, and as the ransom-price of lost sinners, it is by many either set aside or spoken against. It is to the Word of God, however, and to it alone, that we must look for instruction here. And happily there is no point on which its testimony is more explicit. 'He was wounded for our transgressions.' 'The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all.' 'He came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many.' 'He hath once suffered for sin, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us unto God.'

I would not by any means change a single expression employed by those who speak of the meekness and patience and love of Christ manifested in His sufferings and death. But if His sufferings and death were not undergone as a satisfaction for sin,—if they were not the punishment of sin inflicted *on Him* as the sinner's surety and substitute,—then are we all still lying under the penalty of the law, which is this, 'The soul that sinneth it shall die.' But this is the message addressed to us in the gospel : 'Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us.' Surely if words can convey any meaning at all, these words imply that the death of Christ was penal, while it was voluntary ; that He took on Him the curse which was due to us as transgres-

sors of the law, and bore the full weight of it, that by His stripes we might be healed.

2nd. But further, 'He bare the sin of many,' by *removing it out of sight*, so that it is not reckoned against them. This follows, indeed, as a manifest inference from the preceding point. If, in the stead of His people, He endured the punishment due to sin, then they must be freed from punishment; sin must no longer be laid to their charge, so as to expose them to condemnation. This point is very significantly illustrated by the transactions under the law, on the great day of atonement, once a year. The high priest had two he-goats brought to him that were without blemish. He cast lots upon them, whereby one was set apart for sacrifice, and the other was let go into the wilderness. The one that was sacrificed typified Christ in *His death*, bearing the punishment of sin. The blood was carried by the high priest into the most holy place, and sprinkled upon the mercy-seat, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people, as Christ shed His blood for the remission of the sins of many. Then, when this service was accomplished, the high priest was to lay his hand upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions and all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat, and to send him away by the hand of a fit man into the wilderness; and the goat, it was said, 'shall bear upon him all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited'—that is to say, that they should be remembered no more. Now here, I think, you have what is *typical of Christ's resurrection*. Death and life were indicated by the two victims, one of which was for sacrifice, while the other was to be let go alive. The one was slain for atonement by blood-shedding; the other, sent away alive, bore away the sin of the people. By the one, the *punishment* due to sin was noted; by the other, *freedom from condemnation*. And the two things are brought together by the apostle, when he says, that 'Jesus was delivered up to death for our offences, and rose again for our justification.' 'Christ bare the sin of many.' He bore away the sentence which was written against them, so that 'there is no condemnation to them that are in Him.' On the contrary, 'Blessed are they whose iniquities

are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.'

3rd. But once more, in the third place, 'Christ bare the sin of many' in the sense of destroying the power of it in their hearts, and cleansing them from its defilement. He came to *put away sin* by the sacrifice of Himself. There is an efficacy in the blood of Christ to purify the heart and the conscience. When you believe in Him, and know the reality of His love, you desire to serve and please Him. As He gave Himself for you, you give yourselves to Him. As He bore the cross for your sakes, you desire to be crucified with Him to the world and to sin. There is the well-spring of a new life in you. You are the same persons, and yet you have new feelings and desires, a new love, a new power in the midst of temptation to resist sin and to obey God's law. And thus Christ, who Himself bore the punishment which your sin deserved, and blotted out the sentence of condemnation which was written against you, by the effectual grace of His Spirit working in you, and by His love constraining you, enables you to live, not unto yourselves, not unto the flesh, not unto sin and folly, but unto Him who loved you and gave Himself for you. Is it so, my friends? Then are ye truly Christ's; then do ye truly partake of the benefits of His priestly office, of His all-sufficient sacrifice.

4th. But there is yet another department of the priestly office in which we are equally interested, and to which the prophet alludes in the words, 'He made intercession for the transgressors.' On this point, however, I shall only make a few remarks. If we had been present when Christ offered up that remarkable prayer which is recorded in John xvii., we would have felt what it was to be truly in the place of intercession and with the Intercessor. 'I pray for them; I pray not for the world, but for them which Thou hast given me; for they are Thine. Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word. Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which Thou hast given me: for Thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.' What precious words, and how worthy to be pondered by us! They open up the heart of Christ, as He cared for

His people, and sympathized with them, and had regard for their highest interests. He commends them to the Father, that they might be kept by Him, and sanctified; and He claims for them, in words which His own fulfilment of the terms of the covenant of redemption could alone have rendered suitable, a right to the inheritance of glory, the full price of which He was just about to pay.

And now it may be asked, Can we look up to Him as still cherishing the same affection for His people, and engaged in the same work of intercession for them? This question the Scripture answers most plainly, for the comfort of all who follow Christ. 'We have not an High Priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities: let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace.' 'He is able to save unto the uttermost them that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them.' 'Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.' And 'if any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: and He is the propitiation for our sin.' You perceive at once from these passages how strong an interest Christ's people have in heaven, and what encouragement they have to avail themselves of it. Christ Himself is there in your nature, believers, covering all your sins and imperfections under the mantle of His own perfect righteousness, hearing you when you cry to Him in your troubles, and making your case His own as truly as if He were on earth visibly shielding you from your enemies. In all this we have the reality which was typified under the law by the high priest's dress when He appeared in the holy place. On *his shoulders* he carried engraven on precious stones the names of the twelve tribes of Israel: and so also on his *breastplate*, that thus, as transacting for the people with God, he might continually present the memorial of them all. And so Christ, our great High Priest, wearing our nature in heaven, and representing all His people, shows that He has *borne the burden* of their guilt, and that He also has them *at His heart*. And what is required of them is, that they believe and rejoice in this grand truth, and feel that they may count assuredly on

receiving through Him all they need in answer to their prayers, and that they have Him as a defence against all the real evils that may assail them. 'Fear not,' He says to them,—and He says it to all believers here,—'Fear not;' 'Because I live, ye shall live also;' and 'Where I am, there ye shall also be, to behold my glory which the Father hath given me.'

II. Now I come to speak, but it must be very briefly, and in conclusion, of the fruit or reward of Christ's interposition in behalf of His people. This is referred to in the first part of the verse: 'Therefore will I divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong.' In this general promise there is embodied what the psalmist refers to more particularly in several places; as, for example, in the second psalm, where he represents the Father as saying to the Son, 'Ask of me, and I shall give Thee the heathen for Thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for Thy possession.' And again, in Ps. cx., 'The Lord shall send the rod of Thy strength out of Zion: rule Thou in the midst of Thine enemies. Thy people shall be willing in the day of Thy power, in the beauties of holiness. They shall be numerous as the dew-drops from the womb of the morning.'

There is in both these passages a reference to the reward which was to be earned by Christ on account of His previous humiliation and suffering. Because He was the High Priest He became the King. And now, as I have said before, you have to contemplate Him as a conqueror returning from the enterprise on which He had been sent, and bringing His spoil with Him. The spoil *is a ransomed* people, whom He leads to glory, and whom He will assuredly raise to glory.

But there are one or two particulars connected with this part of His work which must be glanced at in a few sentences.

1. Christ the King and the conqueror has gained a victory, not only over sin and death, and the world and Satan, but also over those whom He carries with Him in triumph. They were in rebellion, and they must be subdued. He has to make them a willing people, when He takes them with Him as the trophies of His victory. Their very heart must be changed; their will must be renewed,—in a word, they must be

made new creatures, in order to follow Him to the enjoyment of the inheritance which He has prepared for them. And all these changes He works in them. He makes them new creatures. He makes them willing to serve Him. He converts the rebels into loyal and loving subjects.

2. But then, secondly, when they have thus been added to the train of His followers, and the movement toward the heavenly glory has been begun, it is at first a movement like that of Israel through the wilderness to Canaan. And when you survey the company of the redeemed as they advance with Christ as their Leader, the aspect which they present is somewhat singular. They have got a new heart, and they have laid down their rebellious will, submitting to the will of Christ, and going after Him; but each of them has to bear the cross after Him.

You would not all at once recognise that company as the friends and followers of the Mighty Conqueror of sin and Satan. For some of them seem to be weak, and feeble, and weary, because of the way; some seem troubled by anxieties and fears; others wear the aspect of mourners; and, alas, many of them appear as if they had fallen out by the way, and had contention among themselves, giving occasion to adversaries who watch their progress, and desire to hinder it, to weaken their strength by making them suspicious of one another. But yet, in the midst of all these untoward experiences, the Great Leader is with them, ready to help every weak one, to encourage every fearful one, to comfort every mourner, and to drive away personal strifes and suspicions by turning the eyes of all toward Himself, and making them feel that, as there is one Lord to whom all submit, there must be a unity of heart and soul among the whole body of the redeemed. These things, my friends, are realities. Through a wilderness the Lord of glory, the Conqueror, leads the trophies of His redeeming grace and power. But as truly as when He was on earth He sympathized, and healed, and comforted, and strengthened, and kept together as one those whom the Father had given Him, so He does it now. The case of each is known to Him; their names are all in His book.

3. But now, thirdly, Christ has appointed a *general place* of meeting for all the redeemed, preparatory to their being openly

acknowledged by Him as the fruit of the travail of His soul, and introduced by Him to the full glory and blessedness which He has purchased for them. This great general meeting-place is the grave. They sink into it, one by one, when the period of their earthly journey is ended; and *there* to the world they seem to be lost. But they are not lost. As the martyr Stephen said, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit,' even so *their* spirits are with Christ, and as blessed as the spirit can be when separate from the body. But even the body in which He was served by His people is precious to Christ; and when He has led them so far as is needful for a season, and brought them to the resting-place, the grave, He leaves their bodies there in the meantime, until the whole purpose of redemption is accomplished—until the whole great company is completed, and ready to be *visibly* gathered together into one.

4. Then, in the fourth place, the consummation comes. It is often referred to in the Scripture. I need not quote many passages. These two reveal the whole great transaction: 'We look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body, according to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself.' And again, 'He loved the Church, and gave Himself for it; that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that He might present it to Himself a glorious Church, not having spot, or wrinkle, but that it should be holy and without blemish.' Then at the resurrection day does He truly divide a portion with the great, and the spoil with the strong. Then the words of the psalmist will be verified: Be opened ye gates, be set open ye everlasting doors, that the King of glory may come in, bearing the fruits of His triumph with Him. Oh, my friends, shall we be among them? Only if we can claim Him as our Priest, who hath borne our sin and made intercession for us, and if we have yielded Him true submission as our King. He obtained the mediatorial throne through the sufferings and sacrifice of the priesthood; and we can only rise to sit with Him upon His throne if we have been washed from our guilt in His blood, and purified from all our corruptions, and made like Himself by the working of His Spirit in us. Amen.



## XL.

### THE DEATH OF AARON.

Part of the Lecture on Numbers xx. 14-29 ; being the 164th of the second series of Lectures on the Old Testament.

**I**N our last discourse we had to consider two sad incidents in the history of Israel. First, Miriam, the sister of Moses, who had occupied an important place among the people, was taken away. Her relationship to the lawgiver, and the services which she had rendered, did not procure exemption for her from the fate of the whole generation that came out of Egypt, and were doomed to die in the wilderness, because they distrusted the Lord, and rebelled against Him, when the way was open to them to go up and take possession of the promised land.

Then, after Miriam's death, there was brought under our notice the offence of which Moses himself was guilty, and on account of which he and Aaron were also excluded from Canaan. He was provoked by the murmuring of the people at Meribah because they had no water. When the Lord instructed him how he was to procure it for them, he seemed to think that such mercy could not be exercised toward them. He spoke wrathfully to them ; and instead of bidding them admire the condescension of Jehovah, expressed himself as if it had been he and Aaron who had to furnish them with the water which they needed. On this account, the word of the Lord came to him, saying, ' Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them.' That Moses was deeply affected by the sentence which was thus pronounced against him, he himself tells us ; for, in rehearsing the Lord's dealings toward Israel, in the

Book of Deuteronomy (iii. 23), he says, 'I besought the Lord, saying, I pray Thee, let me go over, and see the good land that is beyond Jordan, that goodly mountain, and Lebanon. But the Lord was wroth with me for your sakes, and would not hear me: and the Lord said unto me, Let it suffice thee; speak no more unto me of this matter. Get thee up into the top of Pisgah, and lift up thine eyes westward, and northward, and southward, and eastward, and behold it with thine eyes: for thou shalt not go over Jordan.' Considering these words merely with relation to the temporal privilege for which Moses prayed, we learn from them that all the faithful services which he had rendered before, as the leader of the Israelites, and all his earnest entreaties, could not procure for him the remission of the sentence which his unbelief had drawn down. Oftener than once had he turned aside the divine displeasure from the people by his pressing intercession in their behalf; but now he cannot procure for himself the favour which he implored, when the decision of the Lord to the contrary had been *expressly* given forth.

This reminds us of what is written with respect to Esau, that he found no place of repentance on the part of his father, though he sought it carefully with tears. And it leads us to think of a matter of yet higher moment, in connection with the spiritual and eternal interests of men, when by unbelief, and heinous sin, which is the fruit of it, they may so weary out the forbearance of God as to place themselves beyond all hope of mercy. Then, it is said, 'they will call upon me, but I will not answer; they will stretch out their hands, but I will not regard.' With such possible result of the abuse of God's long-suffering before us, it becomes us at all times to join trembling with our mirth, and to walk before the Lord with reverence and godly fear, lest He be angry, and we perish from the way if His wrath be kindled but a little.

But although Moses was thus debarred, as we have seen, from conducting the Israelites into Canaan, he does not become regardless of present duty. He will have them move forward in their journey toward the promised inheritance. There were many obstacles in the way, however, and difficulties of various kinds yet to be overcome, before they could reach their destina-

tion. From the place where they were at present encamped, their easiest passage would have been through the land of Edom, and in this way, accordingly, Moses was desirous that they should prosecute their march.

This brings us to consider vers. 14-21.<sup>1</sup>

But now I pass on to consider the remaining verses of the chapter, vers. 22-29: 'And the children of Israel, even the whole congregation, journeyed from Kadesh, and came unto Mount Hor. And the Lord spake unto Moses and Aaron in Mount Hor, by the coast of the land of Edom, saying: Aaron shall be gathered unto his people: for he shall not enter into the land which I have given unto the children of Israel, because ye rebelled against my word at the water of Meribah. Take Aaron and Eleazar his son, and bring them up unto Mount Hor: and strip Aaron of his garments, and put them upon Eleazar his son: and Aaron shall be gathered unto his people, and shall die there. And Moses did as the Lord commanded: and they went up into Mount Hor in the sight of all the congregation. And Moses stripped Aaron of his garments, and put them upon Eleazar his son; and Aaron died there in the top of the mount: and Moses and Eleazar came down from the mount. And when all the congregation saw that Aaron was dead, they mourned for Aaron thirty days, even all the house of Israel.'

How sadly is the camp of Israel, as they draw near to the promised land, thinned by the removal of those who had occupied the most prominent places among them during their pilgrimage in the wilderness!

Others of some note had no doubt been removed, although their names are not mentioned. But in this chapter we lose Miriam and Aaron; the latter the principal person in the congregation next to Moses.

There are few parts of the whole history more affecting than this. Moses says nothing about his own feelings, although these must have been very deeply moved. The message was sent to him, that Aaron's time was come, and that upon

<sup>1</sup> This relates to the refusal of Edom to allow the children of Israel to pass through his border, and to Israel's journeyings by another way; and is here omitted.

Mount Hor, at the foot of which they were now encamped, he must be *gathered to his people*. That is a beautiful form of expression for death, in the case of those who love and serve God, and are prepared for their translation to a higher place. Aaron's people were the fathers who, from the days of Adam downward, had lived and died in the faith of the promised Saviour, and who knew that they were only strangers and sojourners upon earth. Abraham gave up the ghost, and '*was gathered to his people*.' So also it is said of Isaac and Jacob, and others who came after them. When Lazarus the beggar died, we are told that he was carried by angels to Abraham's bosom; he therefore was gathered to his people. But when Judas the traitor perished, it is said that he went *to his own place*—the place which was fit for him, and for which he was fitted, the place of endless misery.

There was therefore tenderness in the form of the message which announced the death of Aaron. It was equivalent to this: he has completed his service in the Church on earth, he must now be removed to join the Church of the redeemed in heaven. Who would not be satisfied with such a prospect for himself, or for those whom he loves most dearly on earth? The announcement of the coming of the Lord might, in such a case, be well answered by the words, 'Amen; even so come, Lord Jesus.'

It is not said that the Israelites were informed of the solemn work which was to be transacted on Mount Hor. The report of it may have been privately circulated among them, but it is not likely that the matter was formally announced, because it might have stirred their feelings too keenly.

As the Lord commanded, however, Moses carried out the precept. Aaron himself, of course, knew what was to be done,—that he was to ascend the mountain to die there. He was clothed in the glorious garments which belonged to him as high priest, as if he had been going to engage in some great ceremonial where he was required to officiate. Thus attired, and accompanied by Moses and Eleazar, and perhaps by some others, although their names are not mentioned, the aged high priest went up into Mount Hor in the sight of all the congregation. Every eye would follow that company; and if the

purpose of their journey was not fully known, the question would be eagerly asked, What does all this mean ?

But they themselves knew, and we cannot conceive of anything more impressive than the ascent of that mountain by Moses and Aaron. Their life had, with little interruption, been as *one* for forty years. They had together watched over the interests of Israel, as we may say, by night and by day. They had endured with much forbearance the provocations of a fickle multitude. They had nothing so dear to them as the well-being of that people whom it was impossible to please. They had had their secret consultations, oftentimes with much depression of spirit, as to what should be done, and how they were to be faithful to the Lord, while they were at the same time affectionate and faithful toward their weighty charge. They had acted together, they had taken counsel together, they had prayed together, they had wept together, and in seasons of enlargement they had rejoiced together. But now they must be separated, although only for a short season. It was with sad heart, no doubt, and with deep solemnity, that this funeral procession, as we may call it, ascended the mount. Oh, it would have been most interesting to read, if it had been recorded, the conversation between these two patriarchs, both of whom—the one now, and the other but a short time afterwards—were to be gathered to their fathers. But perhaps they climbed the mount silently, the heart of each being full of its own reflections ; for death, when it is near, fills the soul with awe, and strangers looking on can speak more freely than those whose affections are strongly moved.

But whether speaking to comfort each other, or in silence, they move slowly upward, until, beyond the vision of the multitude beneath, they reached the spot where Aaron's body was to rest. There Moses took from him the priestly vestments, and put them upon Eleazar his son.

Without any outward sign from heaven to indicate the solemn work which was being transacted, Aaron ceased to breathe,—the silver cord was loosed,—the golden bowl was broken,—the dust was returned to the earth as it was, and the spirit returned unto God who gave it. The tomb of

Aaron on Mount Hor, erected long afterwards, is still visible to the traveller who visits that solitary region. There are superstitious notions cherished in connection with it by the Arabs who dwell in the neighbourhood, and superstitious ceremonies performed by those of them who visit the spot. And it is almost certain that the place really marks Aaron's sepulchre. And now that we read of his removal from his earthly labours, we are constrained to say that, like his sister Miriam, he left dark blemishes in his character, notwithstanding the high place which the Lord selected him to fill. The scene of rebellion at Mount Sinai, in which he took so prominent a part in the worship of the golden calf,—rather encouraging the people in their impious idolatry, than endeavouring to restrain them,—makes us look upon him as a man of weak mind, who, if he had not felt the influence of the strong and rightly directed mind of Moses, would have gone wrong a thousand times. And the part which he afterwards took with Miriam in opposing Moses, was equally unworthy of him, and altogether without excuse. *He* was not visited with any outward mark of the divine displeasure for it, as Miriam was; but this did not make his offence the less. He had his trials, however, which he was enabled to bear with marvellous submission. When his two eldest sons were struck dead for offering unhallowed fire before the Lord, he acquiesced without complaint in the justice of the stroke, and in silent grief beheld and bewailed the terrible breach which had been made in his family. And altogether, although there is no special reference made to the manner in which he discharged his priestly functions, we have every reason to suppose that he was a faithful and compassionate high priest, ever anxious to comfort and to counsel the people as day by day he came in contact with them. They were accustomed to behold the venerable man transacting between them and Jehovah, and labouring for the advancement of their spiritual interests. He was as a father among them. And when he was taken away, they mourned for him thirty days. This seems to have been the period usually allotted for mourning among the Israelites, when a great man was removed. They mourned for Moses thirty days.

It is allowable to mourn for the dead, even when we can mourn in another way than those who have no hope. Sorrow and submission to Jehovah's will are not incompatible or antagonistic. Pleasing remembrances of what the departed said and did, and of their kindnesses to us, cannot but make us bewail their removal; while yet we may be enabled by the grace of God to say, 'Not my will, O Father, but Thine, be done.'

Now, I must make a short improvement of the subject.

1. And in the first place, we may learn a salutary lesson from it in its merely literal bearing. Aaron, the high priest, had to ascend Mount Hor clad in his priestly robes of office; but he must be stript of them there, because he must die there. He could not carry either his dignity or the emblems of it into the next world. He must lay them down at the grave's brink. He ceased to be the high priest, and must leave behind him all the emblems of his sacred authority, when the Lord said to him, 'Your work is done on earth; you must come up hither.' It was well that Aaron was prepared for immortality; for when his robes were taken from him, and his body committed to the grave, there was nothing to distinguish him from the lowest of the people for whom he had offered sacrifices and made intercession formerly.

Now is it not strange how men thrust away from them such reflections as these, in their toils and conflicts to gain place and honour and dignity in the world? There is nothing which the world gives that they can carry with them when death takes hold of them. Even all which *outwardly* pertains to *spiritual dignity*, and which brings men into relation with these things that are imperishable and eternal, must be left behind; and *the individual man*, as God's accountable creature, must appear before his Creator in the judgment. What, then, it may well be asked, could be more foolish than the pursuit of temporal pleasure and honour, when in seeking after them eternal realities are lost sight of? What more insignificant than the proclamation of a man's titles and dignities over the grave, where his body is soon to moulder into dust? My friends, there is one thing imperishable, and *one dignity* which

even death cannot tarnish. The *imperishable* thing is the life which the Spirit of God imparts to the soul, and which connects the soul with Christ. With respect to it, the apostle says, 'Our life is hid with Christ in God; and when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall we appear with Him in glory.' And the *deathless dignity* is that of being the children of God. To all who believe in Christ does this dignity belong; and the reality of it is made good by the indwelling of the Spirit in the believer, so that he is made a temple of God, and is sealed as God's property for ever. Then whatever earthly good we seek, let us seek it in subordination to these higher and nobler blessings, into the full enjoyment of which death and the grave do only conduct us.

2. In the second place, Aaron must be stript of his robes, and his son clad with them in his stead. This reminds us that while the priests under the law were not suffered to continue by reason of death, yet *the office of the priesthood* did not lapse. Aaron's rod blossomed; and this betokened the continuance of the priesthood in his family. Although death must cause the old fruit to fall, new fruit would grow and be matured in its place. It was a mercy to the Israelites, that when the venerable man who had gone into the holy of holies to make intercession for them was removed, there was another, strong and vigorous, appointed by the Lord to take his place. Aaron's robes were not buried with him,—the office of the high-priesthood did not expire with him. His successor was provided. Yet this very fact that he needed a successor,—that the office must be transmitted from one to another,—leads us to think of the blessed contrast which the apostle draws between the priests under the law and Him who abideth for ever. When one priest under the law died, and another came in his place, some might say, 'I knew the one, and could tell him my difficulties and ask his counsel; but what am I to do now?' That difficulty, my friends, you are freed from. You have the same High Priest for ever, who is touched with the feeling of your infirmities. You have cast yourselves upon His sympathy before, and you can with perfect confidence do it still. Aaron died, Eleazar died, and all



that followed them,—some personally worthy of reverence, and others not. But Jesus, our High Priest, abideth ever. ‘Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever.’ Doubting, fearing, trembling ones, feed upon this truth: Jesus Christ is gone into heaven, and ever liveth to make intercession for His people. Amen.

THE END.

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